WIRE

No pussyfooting with
Nick Cave's wild bunch

Grinderman

PETER HAMMILL
CAIRO: CRADLE OF ELECTRONICA
RACHID TAHA
Paul Burwell 1949-2007
Robert Horton
Polly Shang Kuan Band

THE WIRE 277 MARCH 2007
Adventures In Modern Music
£3.60 9 770952 060076 03

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The Masthead

Savage Pencil = Trip Or Squeak (detail)

It's a fact: the earth is fucked. Both an intergovernmental panel of scientists and Savage Pencil say it's so, and that's bad enough for now. Climate change, concludes the panel with 90 per cent certainty is down to the CO_2 emissions produced by human activity. That ten per cent of scientific doubt might be enough for the odd naysayer to gamble on the future of the planet but those don't sound like good odds to the rest of us. Faced with the prospect of the world heating up by four degrees by the end of the century, melting ice caps and disappearing Alpine glaciers, it's beyond time for the likes of me to curb my enthusiasms.

Some 30 plus years into chasing music around the globe, that's not going to be easy. After all, the planet's latest gloomy prognosis came out between me getting back from a trip to Tokyo and the arrival on my doorstep of what now feels like an unnecessary, if not downright indulgent purchase of a seven DVD set of *Die Zweite Heimat* – the second part of Edgar Reitz's monumental film saga covering the German 20th century. It looks markedly different viewed from the perspective of the present. Over 25 hours, the film focuses on a New Music composer, Hermann Simon, and his circle of artist, poet and film maker friends in Munich, from their student days at the beginning of the 1960s through them experiencing the trickledown effect of the German economic miracle and being able to stage their work to a bemused public. In one rehearsal scene before the presentation of an electroacoustic piece, Simon is seen pulling his hair out searching for the source of the kind of hum that would later give birth to whole new genres of German and Austrian electronica. Without silence there is no New Music, he storms.

Meanwhile, outside my London window, it's snowing. Can't recall how long it's been since Londoners have had enough snowfall to seriously mute city noise. With that intergovernmental panel finding ringing in everyone's ears, you have to ask what other sound experiences will vanish as conditions worsen over the course of the century. The rate of disappearance makes ever more urgent Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart's mission with the US Library Of Congress to preserve lost sounds. "There's so much music out there being lost on a daily basis," he stated in 2000. "Some is socially and economically impacted, like in the rainforests, and some is decaying in the vaults. There are two ways to look at endangerment. One is that the music itself is disappearing, the other is that one of-a-kind source material is rotting." On that note, I should redirect you to Savage Pencil's Trip Or Squeak cartoon (page 9) for further illumination. CHRIS BOHN

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Images Sébastien Agnetti, Shinya Aizawa, Kareem Black, Chris Buck, Jesse Chehak, Leon Chew, Tara Darby, Eva Edsjö, Jason Evans, Erwan Frotin, Dominik Gigler, Raphael Hefti, John Hooper, Ivan Jones, Körner Union, Dirk Lindner, Declan O Neill, Andy Rumball, Savage Pencil, Michael Schmelling, Anne Schori, Clare Shilland, Jun Takagi, Jo Ann Toy, Danielle Van Ark, Eva Vermandel, Kai Von Rabenau, Jake Walters, Keiko Yoshida

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Rates (12 issues)
UK £39
Europe £55
USA and Canada US$100/£55
Rest of the World
£65 Air/£50 Surface

Distributors

News stands

UK, Europe & Rest of World (excluding USA)
COMAG Specialist Division
Tavistock Works Tavistock Road
West Drayton Middlesex UB7 7QX
Tel +44 (0)1895 433800
Fax +44 (0)1895 433801
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NB: For US subscriptions contact *The Wire*

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Bookshops

Worldwide
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Tel +44 (0)20 8986 4854
Fax +44 (0)20 8533 5821
sasha@centralbooks.com

NB The Wire *can also supply record shops in Europe and the US direct*

Issue 277

Adventures in Modern Music
March 2007 £3.80
ISSN 0952-0686 (USPS 006231)

23 Jacks Place 6 Corbet Place London E1 6NN, United Kingdom Tel +44 (0)20 7422 6922
Fax +44 (0)20 7422 6011 info@thewire.co.uk
www.thewire.co.uk

The Wire is published 12 times a year by *The Wire* Magazine Ltd. Printed by St Ives plc. Digital imaging by DP Graphics (www.dpgraphics.co.uk)

USA: *The Wire* ISSN 0952 0686 (USPS 006231) is published 12 times a year by *The Wire* Magazine Ltd at a US subscription rate of $100. Per official postage paid at Middlesex, New Jersey 08846. Postmaster send address changes to: *The Wire* Magazine c/o PO Box 177, Middlesex, NJ 08846. US agent: Pronto Mailers, 200 World Ave Middlesex, NJ 08846. NB: Subscribers please also inform *The Wire* direct of any address changes.

The Wire was founded in 1982 by Anthony Wood. Between 1984–2000 it was part of Naim Attallah's Nemara Group. In December 2000 it was purchased in a management buy-out organised by the magazine's staff. It continues to publish as a 100 per cent independent operation.

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All Modernism, No Hobbitism.

ALSACE LORRAINE
Dark One
CD (Darla)

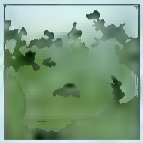
Featuring our favorite vocalist Isel (Entre Rios) + remixes by Robin Guthrie & Ian Catt (St. Etienne)

I AM ROBOT AND PROUD
The Catch + Spring Summer Autumn Winter
CD (Darla)

Reissue comprising the first full length + the seasons EP

THE ORCHIDS
Good to be a stranger
CD (Siesta)

Described by the Melody Maker as "the best Scottish pop band since Orange Juice" the long awaited return is a must for pop lovers



ARC LAB
No Spectre
CD (n5MD)

High quality emotional electronics. Fans of Telefon Tel Aviv, Arovane and Proem should take notice of this rising talent in the genre.

n5MD

THE LADYBUG TRANSISTOR
Here Comes The Rain
CD EP (Green UFOs)

Ladybugs joined by Alicia Vanden Heuvel (Asilers Set) Gus Franklin Isabel Knowles Keli Sutherland (Alch tectum Helsinki) Ians Lakman Kevin Barker (Cumulock Co) Paul Niehaus (Calexico Lambchop)

RELIGIOUS KNIVES
Remains
CD (No Fun productions)

Mike & Maya (Double Leopards) Nate (Mouthus) A psychedelic one of beautiful synth melodies guitar twisted percussion & haunting vocals. Includes the OOP No Fun LP a tour only COR & Heavy Tapes 7

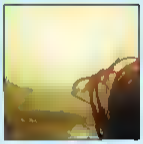
AT SWIM TWO BIRDS
Returning To The Scene Of The Crime
CD (Green UFOs)

Roger Quigley (The Montgomery Brothers) Mood changing and full of deep beauty. A certain similarity to The Durutti Column and Turtlestacks but with ASTB it is the lyrics which play the key role

TOBIAS LILJA
Time is on My Side
CD (n5MD)

Sweden's Tobias Lilja mixes melodic vocals and swirling textural noise to reflect every controlled desperation a lastrong balance of contradiction always just about to break.

n5MD



subtractiveLAD
No Man's Land
CD (n5MD)

SubtractiveLAD has yet again captured a resounding annotation at n5MD as a label and style categorisation

n5MD

BURNING STAR CORE
Blood Lightning 2007
CD (No Fun Productions)

Creeping drones mutilated vocal incantations & unrecognisable sounds both acoustic and electronic. Another Classic in sound exploration from the mind of Mr Spencer Yeh

LULLATONE
Plays Pajama Pop Pour Vous
CD (Audio Dregs Recordings)

A tiny tiny orchestra whispery vocals subliminal techno & bossa nova. "Sit down and listen to this with your eyes closed and feel yourself never wanting to open them up again.

WINTER FLOWERS
Winter Flowers
CD (Attack 9)

Their new self titled album on Attack Nine is pretty darn good New Weird America LEFT HIP

FREESCHA
Head Warlock Double Stare
CD (Attack 9)

"Wash up spunky synthwizzers with simply crunchers warped in nice key electronic pop completely in its own category. Think proud old mansions built on dust devils but also think color and light and stylish night club action. ERASING CLOUDS

LYNX AND RAM
The System's On And It's Flashing Red
CD (Sublight)

Carl Vincke & Julian Fane of Planet Mu fame Mach uegun rock drums mashed guitars blasting synths and full throttle electro punk vocals. On the verge of spontaneous combustion.

S

YELLOW6
Painted Sky
CD (Resonant)

Yellow6's ability to take droning guitars and create minimalistic breathtaking. Few modern guitarists can match the elegant beauty of his work. For any fan of dreampop ambient post rock, shoegaze or shoegaze

resonant

CARLOS GIFFONI
Arrogance
CD (No Fun Productions)

Infusing ambient electronics primal energy walls of monumental layered sound create massive slowly evolving structures that are both beautiful and terrifying. Welcome to a new era of pure sound

THE MAGIC WHISPERS
Carousels and Magic Boxes
CD (Siesta)

A feminine duo that never goes out of style in the tradition of Strawberry Switchblade Ephemera or Pipettes

VARIOUS ARTISTS
ERRE QUE ERRE
CD (Siesta)

This diverse compilation conveys the attitude and soul of a label that shifted somehow the destiny of pop in the 90's

HIGH MOUNTAIN TEMPEL
Pacific Sky Burial (Axxxxxxs mix)
CD (Lotushouse)

Full of chants and percussion mixed with minimal Klaus Schulze 'Cyborg' are synths HMT have created a highly meditative album of ambient awareness It's damn spooky at times too

MELODIUM
Flacana Flacana
CD (Audio Dregs Recordings)

For his 7th album, Melodium remixes for the pure simple and emotional "the album as a whole impresses as one lively uninterrupted sweep" Zen listening for rainy days

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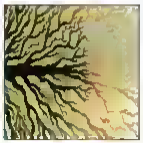

VARIOUS ARTISTS
PRESENCE UNDER THE TREE
2xCD (Attack 9)

23 EXCLUSIVE tracks by 17 Attack Nine artists "A successful introduction and overview of the Attackninne roster which will have me investigating said artists in much more detail in 2007 9/10 FOXY DIGITALIS

Letters

Write to: Letters, *The Wire*, 23 Jack's Place, 6 Corbet Place, London E1 6NN
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Universal consciousness

Many thanks for your brief tribute to Alice Coltrane in the wake of her sudden loss (Bitstream, *The Wire* 276). It reminded me of the illuminating interview you published a few years back and stood in stark contrast to some of the discouraging obituaries printed in the last two weeks. The majority of critics still seems bewildered by the scope of her compositions and finds her hard to place in the idiom known as jazz.

One writer began his farewell with the cliched notion that she must have been humourless due to the devotional religious nature of her album titles. Yet rarely did her husband face mockery because of his chosen faith and its undeniable influence on his creativity. This highlights perhaps two issues. While not apparently political, Alice Coltrane did break some ground for female instrumentalists in the era. Although not ignoring the brooding self-belief of vocalists Linda Sharrock and Patty Waters, the only comparison might be Carla Bley. *Escalator Over The Hill* in particular echoes Coltrane's own sense that listeners must think on their feet to work out what's happening. Bley was musically ambitious and also personally linked to famous jazz musicians, but she didn't struggle against the harsh criticism that haunted Coltrane's legacy.

Her music is undeniably serious-minded and spiritually theoretical, yet I keep returning for the sheer joy her daring juxtapositions still bring. To listen to one of her records is often to hear so many disparate global sounds fed into coherence by the beauty and goodwill of her vision. So we travel from dramatic gospel piano chords to bass soul grooves to Eastern drone to chaotic avant string dissonance to warped organ vamps and holy chants, then back to where it all began before her journey in Satchidanenda: the textural freedoms of Village Vanguard improvisations. Impulse! must remaster the far-reaching *Lord Of Lords* so it can meet a new audience. Thank you.
Turner Newton London, UK

Generator X

Many thanks for the interesting feature on Seismic Performances (*The Wire* 276). The stipulation that the writers had to have actually been at the concerts they described was undoubtedly the right way to proceed, although it meant that some of the selections were rather less seismic than the title suggested. My own choice would have to be the 2005 Royal Festival Hall reunion concert by Van Der Graaf Generator. Onstage for the first time in almost 30 years (except for a couple of ad hoc appearances), these four unassuming middle aged men tore ferociously into their repertoire, banishing accusations of nostalgia with sustained sax and organ fuelled intensity. Coming the day after Blair's re-election, the line *"Every bloody emperor with his sickly rictus grin talks his way out of nearly anything but the lie within"* was chilling in its timeliness.
Richard Rees Jones Vienna, Austria

Ys and wherefores

I was angered to read Jon Dale's Dredd Foole review (*The Wire* 275) in which (along with Devendra Banhart) Joanna Newsom is dismissed as "easy listening" music with "sanded down and smoothed out roundelay tunes and wilfully contrived oddness". This reads dangerously like snobbery. *Ys* is a lush, luxurious production, but with Van Dyke Parks's astonishing string arrangements and the perplexing song structures it demands the listener's full attention as it goes about creating its own enchanting world. What makes the oddness "contrived"? And would that necessarily be a bad thing? I would say *Ys* is deliciously contrived. What's "easy listening" about it? And are you suggesting that 'easy' equals invalid? Tell that to Sonic Youth with their Carpenters fixation. Could it be that Joanna Newsom's success (not that *Ys* made the UK Top 40) has prejudiced small minded people against her unique music? I hope not, as this would be the sort of elitism your magazine should rise above.
S Fell via email

Beauty stab

Thank you for the noise round up by Keith Moliné in Rewind 2006 (*The Wire* 275), and also for Joseph Stannard's review of the new GHO album (272). The GHO review revolved around a notion of 'terrible beauty'. Is beauty the only objective criterion for aesthetic judgment in reviewing 'modern music'? I remember in your Primer on Spectral music (237), Andy Hamilton described a James Dillon piece as "difficult and disturbing". Would it need to be difficult, disturbing and beautiful to be worth hearing? Part of the pleasure of listening to music by, say, Coil is a broadening of the aesthetic palette. One needs an equivalent broadening of the grammatical palette to describe this pleasure. Perhaps Ian Penman gives lessons?
David Evans via email

Ski/nned alive

I found the review of my recent CD *Ski/nn* (*The Wire* 274) a bit odd, which may well be my own doing. The reviewer states: "An uneasy connotation of the world ranging ethos, though, is amplified by the packaging. The poem *Familiar Wood* Sondheim includes may refer to nothing more phallic than his trusty musical instruments, but as the album title's ski and skin go together like knives and muscle, sexualised violence is disturbingly evident in the writings' misogynist imagery". I can't argue with the interpretation (writing is always open to interpretation of any sort, of course), but I do want to point out that misogyny was not my intention (and no one else has found the text such); it *was* dealing with violence – with the bedrock of sex and violence in our society, which, at least for me, underscores the music as well. The title was a perhaps misguided reference to the old M Girl/Jarboe Skin group, as well as 'nn' – Natasha Nevanova (who created Neto55). I certainly wasn't thinking of skis or knives or phalluses, however it might appear.
Alan Sondheim via email

Something for the weekend

Mea culpa! Sorry, fact fans! The 'lost weekend' in my Epiphanies piece (*The Wire* 276) was February 1976 – not April. It was a long lost weekend and took some time to recover from. I guess the old trope about the 1960s (if you were there, you can't remember) may also apply to the mid-70s?
Richard Boon via email

The nightmare continues

In his review of ATP The Nightmare Before Christmas (*The Wire* 276), Derek Walmsley claims that Kevin Shields did the sound for Dinosaur Jr. However, I must correct him: I did the sound.
Ajay Sagger Soundation, via email

***The Wire* 278**

The April issue of *The Wire* will be on sale from 22 March.

www.thewire.co.uk

New exclusives on *The Wire* site this month include music from Peter Hemmill, Polly Shang Kuen Band and Robert Horton, film clips from Semiconductor and Ray Lee, and more.

Sign up to The Conduit, our fortnightly e-newsletter, at www.thewire.co.uk.

Adventures in Modern Music on Resonance 104.4 FM

A weekly show of new music hosted by *The Wire* staff, broadcasting across Central London on 104.4 FM every Thursday, 8–9.30pm GMT, with simultaneous streaming at www.resonancefm.com.

Shows are archived as downloadable MP3s at www.thewire.co.uk/web/air.php.

ONO
YES, I'M A WITCH

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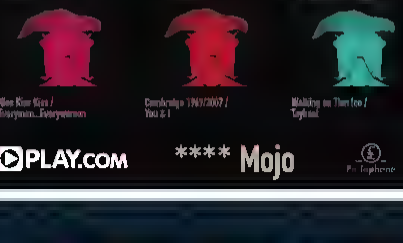

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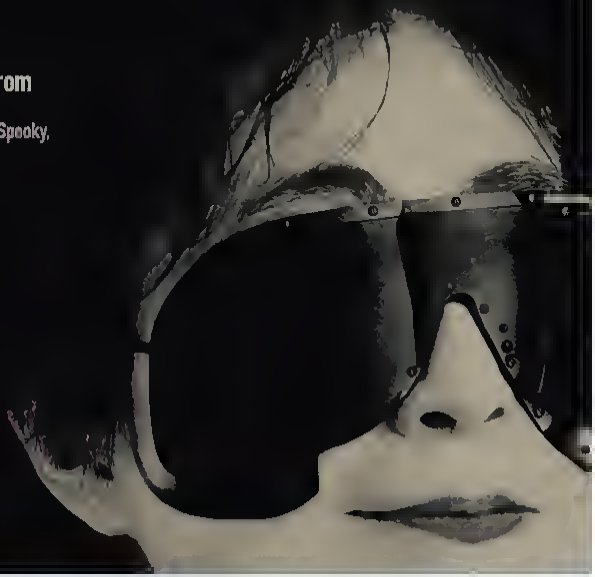

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10 Mar	Liverpool, Carling Academy	**27 Mar**	Exeter, Phoenix
12-13 Mar	Edinburgh, Liquid Room	**29 Mar**	Hove, The Old Market
14/15 Mar	Aberdeen, The Tunnels	**1 Apr**	London, Hammersmith Palais
16/17 Mar	Glasgow, The Ferry	**2 Apr**	Bristol, Carling Academy
21 Mar	Leeds, Irish Centre	**3/4 Apr**	Oxford, The Zodiac

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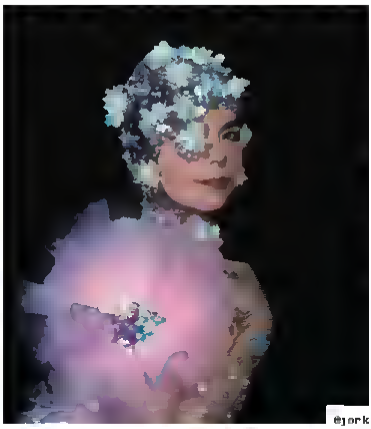
Bitstream News and more from under the radar

DAT Politics at Faster Than Sound

Uwe Nettelbeck, the originator of Faust, passed away on 17 January. Faust member Jean Hervé Peron writes: "Besides being a sharp-witted but yet charming and loving husband/father/grandfather... [Uwe] was an outstanding cook, a writer who always generated deep emotions and interest and a genius selfless music producer." Nettelbeck had been a film maker and journalist when he conceived the notion of founding Faust in 1970. He remained their producer and mentor through the group's early 'Wumme years' at a commune outside Hamburg, and his unique and unconventional attitude to the recording studio contributed to the sound of such celebrated albums as *So Far* and *The Faust Tapes*. Meanwhile, despite the personnel complexities that recently surfaced in these pages (see Letters, *The Wire* 276), the Faust saga rambles on. A new Faust album featuring Jean-Hervé Peron, Zappi Diermaier and Amaury Cambuzat (Ulan Bator), and mixed by Nurse With Wound's Colin Potter and Steven Stapleton, is scheduled to come out this spring. Details at Peron's Website, www.art-errorist.de



Björk

Björk's as yet untitled follow-up to 2004's *Medulla* is scheduled to be released on 7 May. The singer has recruited an all new cast for the recording, including Lightning Bolt's drummer Brian Chippendale, Antony, Timbaland and Konono No 1. Björk also covered "Boho Dance" on the Nonesuch tribute to Joni Mitchell... to be released 24 April. Free drummer Chris Corsano will be a part of Björk's touring group. Due to the appointment, Corsano has had to drop out of CMN's Free Noise tour and has been replaced by Paul Hession (see Out There).

Following its first incarnation in June last year, *The Wire* is sponsoring the one-day digital arts festival **FasterThan Sound**, hosted at the Cold War environment of Bentwaters airbase in Suffolk. Artists from various backgrounds will explore electronic music genres, contemporary classical practice and interactive visual arts. A range of immersive installations, musical collaborations, a wireless walk in the woods, illuminated Cold War buildings and a large dome filled with sounds are among the attractions. Performances confirmed so far are Russell Haswell & Hecker, DAT Politics, Mira Calix & Tansy Davies, µ-Ziq, Modified Toy Orchestra, installations from Loop, Jem Finer, Throbbing Gristle and Touch. For full details and updates go to www.fasterthansound.com

Shirley Collins, one of the great English voices whose career spanned post-war 'industrial folk' song to 70s folk rock with The Albion Band, received an MBE (Member of the British Empire) in the 2007 New Year Honours List for services to music. Although she has retreated from recording and public performance since the late 70s, her music has been heralded by David Tibet, who persuaded Collins to contribute to the 1996 Current 93 album *The Starres Are Marching Sadly Home*, and last year's *Black Ships Ate The Sky*. Her autobiographical account of collecting folk songs in America with Alan Lomax, *America Over The Water*, has just been republished in a new paperback edition by SAF. A theatrical tour based on the book, featuring readings, projections and music extracts, will continue occasionally in 2007. see www.shirleycollins.co.uk

Britain's Sonic Arts Network is working with Goldsmiths College to make electronic music pioneer, inventor and Radiophonic Workshop co-founder **Daphne Oram**'s life's work accessible through a programme of digitisation. Oram is one of many unsung heroines of the early years of electronica, her output ranging from commercial jingles and BBC incidental music to her own compositions using her patented Oramics system. By the end of the year, SAN will have created a Website to explore her creations and ideas. Paradigm Discs' new compilation of her music, *Oramics*, is reviewed on page 46. www.sonicartsnetwork.org

Benoît Sonnette, founder of the Paris-based Textile label and tireless organiser of tours throughout Europe, lost an 18-month battle with leukaemia on 30 January, leaving behind his wife and young son. Though his life was cruelly cut short, the list of musicians who had the joy of his infectious enthusiasm and boundless energy as a label manager, promoter or close friend was long and varied, including Alma Fury, Oren Ambarchi, Lol Coxhill, Paul Flaherty, Fursaxa, Hasslehound, Jackie-O Motherfucker, Magik Markers, Noxagt, Otomo Yoshihide, Ticklish, Vibracathedral Orchestra, Volcano The Bear and many others. The label will continue to exist – as his friend and business partner Fabien Louis says: "He would come back to haunt us if it didn't." textilerec.free.fr/

'New Complexity' composer **Brian Ferneyhough** is to receive this year's International Ernst Von Siemens Music Prize, including remuneration to the tune of €200,000. His recent opera *Shadowtime*, premiered at the Munich Biennale in 2004 and reviewed in *The Wire* 245, took as its starting point Walter Benjamin's death while fleeing from the Nazis, and proceeded to analyse various aspects of Benjamin's thought.

Brian Ferneyhough

On 31 March, Spadition Gallery, Bremen, Germany, will open a retrospective exhibition of new works by *The Wire*'s resident cartoonist **Savage Pencil** aka Edwin Pouncey, plus drawings and paintings by Belgian artist Dennis Tyfus. (For a sample of Tyfus's work, see this month's limited edition *Wire* T-shirt at www.thewire.co.uk/shop.) The exhibition's opening night will feature a performance by Norwegian noise duo Jazkamer. www.spadition-bremen.org

Patti Smith's new album *Twelve* is scheduled for release on 16 April on Columbia Records. "An album of songs newly interpreted" is how it's being described. In other words, it's a covers album of songs by Stevie Wonder, Neil Young, Jimi Hendrix, Bob Dylan, Nirvana, Jefferson Airplane and, eyebrow-raisingly, Tears For Fears. In May she will also take up a four day residence as part of the **Women's Arts International Festival** in Kendal, Cumbria, alongside

Patti Smith

PETER SANDGROUND

Marianne Faithfull, Hanna Hukkelberg, Bat For Lashes, Susanna & The Magical Orchestra, Marissa Nadler and others. Apart from concerts, the festival features a plethora of literary and poetry performances as well as exhibitions. It runs from 4–24 May at Kendal Brewery Arts Centre. For more information visit www.womensartsinternational.co.uk

London's experimental radio station **Resonance 104.4 FM** has upgraded its transmitter and broadcasting antenna following a fundraising push. FM reception in London is considerably better, and further-reaching, than ever before. The station continues to stream its programmes on its Website www.resonancefm.com

A large scale **Tony Conrad** project slated to take place at Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in London on 23 April has been postponed. According to curator Mark Webber, the event will now happen in 2008.

This just in: *The Wire* will be programming a series of talks, discussions and provocative interventions at three of the UK's most challenging music festivals this year – **Kill Your Timid Notion** (Dundee, April), **Music Lovers' Field Companion** (Gateshead, May) and **Instal** (Glasgow, October). Watch this space for further details.

Japanese guitarist and vocalist **Jutok Kaneko** died suddenly on 24 January in Tokyo, aged 48. He was best known for his longrunning psychedelic rock trio Kousokuya, who formed in 1978 and were a fixture on the noise/improv scene of the late 70s, alongside

Jutok Kaneko

KAZUHIRO OKUNO

the likes of Keiji Haino, Tamio Shiraishi and Tori Kudo. Kaneko perpetually drove his music to the high volume brink of rhythmic chaos and melodic dissolution, where he unearthed many rich seams of rock expressivity. In recent years he seemed to have entered a new phase of creativity, releasing two acclaimed solo albums (*Endless Ruins* on PSF, *Live At Jarry Jeff* on Thera) and reforming Kousokuya with its classic line-up of bassist/vocalist Mick and drummer Ikuro Takahashi. □

Trip Or Squeek By Savage Pencil

David Toop pays tribute to the Bow Gamelan percussionist, instrument builder and noisemaker

Paul Burwell 1949–2007

Paul Burwell and David Toop at the LMC 1978

In the post on Monday morning, advance warning of the Contemporary Music Networks Free Noise tour, a convergence of free jazz and noise that ratifies a tendancy pressure-cooking ever since the first scream of guitar feedback mated with the first read-bitten tenor saxophone. Immediately, I thought of Paul Burwell, percussionist, pyro-technocrat and human tornado; not only because this interzone of non-denominational noise was his homeland, but because I knew that his life had been hanging in the balance for five days, maintained by life support machines in Hull Royal Infirmary.

Just hours after that press release was set aside, bad news blew in: at around 7pm on Sunday evening, Paul's life had transferred to some other place, one I like to imagine as a steam driven Nautilus, a ghost ship on which Sun Ra, Baby Dodds and Bongo Joe might be found jamming on a bandstand flanked by Tibetan exorcists expelling demons with cho damaru pellet drums, masked Siberian shamans pounding giant bull-skin frame drums, painted with images of rainbows, eyes, bird men and trees, full of spirits.

Born in Ruislip in 1949, Paul sidestepped his mother's vision of her son, future clarinettist, by taking to drums. He studied with dance band legend Max Abrahams, also tutor to Tony Meehan of The Shadows; snare drum rattle stayed with him for life, but Sun Ra, Albert Ayler and Ornette Coleman subverted more pedestrian values even before school was over. "I was always interested in Milford Graves speaking of a drum as a membrane," he told *Melody Maker* in 1977, "and the fact that Ed Blackwell is so totally conscious."

We met at the Roundhouse, Chalk Farm, London, in 1969, both 20, plunging into nocturnal jam sessions convened on the stage of an ice show. Struggling to build new music out of avant rock and free jazz, we were frustrated by the conservatism or lassitude of others. Once reconciled to being a duo, named as Rain In The Face, we hacked out an uneasy place in the emergent free improvisation scene. By 1970 Paul had recorded on tablas for Pandit Sain Trikhe's Mushroom LP, *Three Sitar Pieces*, and both of us played on singer-songwriter Simon Finn's *Pass The Distance*. He also worked with poet Carlyle Reedy, in her Monkey Theatre, and can be seen in performance with her on the jacket of Michael Nyman's book, *Experimental Music* (1974 edition).

Perhaps by some obscure path influenced by his father, who ran the scene decoration department at BBC television, Paul made a leap from Merchant Navy School, where he trained briefly as an officer, then landscape gardener and gravedigger, to a place at Ealing School of Art. Once enrolled, he befriended the senior lecturer in music, Christopher Small, and took a pragmatic approach to facilities. John Stevens was loaned a classroom in which to hold his groundbreaking improvisation workshops, and our newly formed abAna trio with sound poet Bob Cobbing grew into a sextet (with Chris Small, Lyn Conetta and Herman Hauge). Inspired by Cobbing's Writers Forum press, Paul launched his own imprint, Mirlinton, and published chapbooks such as *Paths Into The Forest* and *Subtle Sculpture*. Ealing College also enabled the production of *New/Rediscovered Musical Instruments*, a collaboration with my own imprint, Quartz Publications. Later, this experience was invaluable in the production of *Musics* magazine, *Readings* (a magazine of performance art co-edited with Annabel Nicolson), and in his vital role as a founding member and first secretary of the London Musicians Collective.

Throughout Paul's life he invented many bizarre, fabulous noisemaking devices, plucked from parallel worlds: Bosch, Tinguely, Leonardo da Vinci, Mervyn Peake, Raymond Roussel, the Canadian north west coast Kwakiutl people. A case in point was *If you were born in '33, you would have been '45 in '78*, the magnificently abrasive metal record player bicycle exhibited in Sonic Boom at the Hayward Gallery in 2000. If he ever entertained the idea of heroes, then they were Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Alfred Jarry and the catastrophic dadaist Arthur Cravan, whose drunken attempt to box Jack Johnson ended in less than one round. This irreconcilable trio was embedded in Paul's character. He built or destroyed, understanding their mutuality and accepting the consequences. The flipside of his sensitivity in performances with Annabel Nicolson, Sylvia Hallett or Sarah Hopkins was his willingness to battle the famous Kodo Drummers on Sado Island in Japan, and win, or to dress himself in paper then ignite the costume.

Fused with a fiercely energetic, dramatic commitment to live performance, Paul's technical inventions opened out into a life's work. After Ealing he studied at the Royal College of Art, an association formed during this period with pyrotechnic sound artist Stephen Cripps at his Butlers Wharf studio proved to be concussive. One conflagration of flour, smoke, explosives and water at Oxford Museum of Modern Art in the midst of Jackson Pollock paintings almost precipitated an art market meltdown. Another artist at Butlers Wharf, Anne Bean, joined them and her collaborations with Paul initiated one of the most important phases of his trajectory. Installation artist Richard Wilson owned a boat, and so river trips transmuted into performances through some evolutionary process.

After the death of Cripps in 1982, Wilson, Burwell and Bean formed Bow Gamelan Ensemble, a spectacular channelling of drumming, instrument invention, physics, urban landscape, drawing with light and sculpting with sound. From bedroom drumming to seamanship, Brunel to Cravan, Paul's life seemed to lead inexorably to this point. Important work followed after the original Bow Gamelan split in 1990, notably his residency at The Midland Arts Centre in 1992. This inspired a new generation, including Ansuman Biswas, Jony Easterby, Mark Anderson, and Kirsten Reynolds of Project Dark. By 2000 Paul had uprooted from Bow to Hull, living and working at Kingston Rowing Club. There he stayed, inspiring others, shaking a fist at the world, still true to his core beliefs until his tragic end.

One of Paul's favourite pieces of music was "The Old Men Of The Shells", a pibroch sung by Calum Johnston, then played on the Scots Highland bagpipe by Pipe Major John MacLellan. The passionate, heroic, essentially lonely art of pibroch is pared down to its emotional core in this early 1960s recording. Johnston's otherworldly vocal carries folk memory from Gaelic song, a feud song, the MacKenzies of Kintail toasting their dead by sipping whisky from scallop shells. "The black old men of the shells," the sleevenote tells us, "may have been lucky enough to possess a still which supplied as much whisky as they could drink." Those of us who knew Paul may raise, or lower, a dram at this point. ☐ *Paul Burwell, musician, sound sculptor, 24 April 1949–4 February 2007*

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Blood relatives By Keith Moliné

"My first ever band experience was when I was 16 or 17, with a friend in her bedroom. We were called The Psychedelic Sadists or some shit like that. We played her brother's Castle Grayskull [a popular 80s kids' toy] and clanked some chains." Brighton based noise polymath Karen Constance is getting all misty eyed about her misspent youth, wryly describing her original sound making tools as a 'minimal set-up'. The tools may have changed – they now include "lots of fucked up tape players and four track recorders, loop pedals, voice, my kid's voice, found tapes, animal sounds, all making for a pretty fucked up and result" – but in many ways, the music she's producing today still sounds like play. The game may be twisted and scary, but no listener could miss the childlike sense of fun that lies behind Constance's work. Her regular pseudonym is Karen Lollypop, after all.

She has been making ears prick up 'n' bleed for close on a decade now, and become a central presence in a burgeoning UK dirty Improv scene that has Skullflower's Matthew Bower as its godfather and counts among its number Constance's husband Dylan Nyoukis (Decaer Pinga). With Nyoukis she involves herself in various projects, most recently Blood Stereo and Ceylon Mange (the latter in the company of guitarist Bill Nace), and operates solo under the name Smack Music 7. But Polly Shang Kuan Band are her most visible group at present, an all female aggregation of rebid, trashy, but bracing noisemakers who have taken up the shouty gauntlet thrown down by fellow Brightoners Leopard Leg and run with it into new weird electronic territory. In fact, Constance's current PSKB cohorts Moreen Farrell and Maya-Victoria Kjellstrand are former members of the now defunct LL collective. With a plethora of CD-R releases on the Chocolate Monk imprint founded by Nyoukis in the early 90s, and a forthcoming album due on the Ultra Eczema label not to mention some mindbandingly intense live shows which habitually find the trio howling like lost souls in a maelstrom of feedback and noise, the group's notoriety is expanding exponentially.

The reasons why Constance initiated the Polly Shang Kuan project (the name is a tribute to the cult martial arts actress) are twofold: she wanted to be able to play live in a more forgiving context than that of solo performance and it was also an opportunity to set up an all female group. "I started Polly Shang Kuan Band in 1999," she recalls. "The first thing was actually just me doing some cut-ups with a recording of my friend Cecile Gilbert, which ended up on the Polly Shang/Smack Music split 7" on Ecstatic Peace. I wanted to play out live though, so when I got a chance to play with The Laundry Room Squelchers I recruited more members, who played for the first couple of shows." I wonder how this early incarnation of her group sat alongside the notoriously unhinged Miami noise heroes LRS. Weren't the participants slightly overwhelmed? "These weren't people who were even aware of noise. It was more an A Band kind of thing, people just turning up with whatever gear they had and letting rip." The next few years saw PSKB operating as a shifting collective under Constance's tutelage. "Some people would stay for just one show, others for two or three. In total over 25 ladies have Shang Kuened."

For the moment, however, the trio line up seems pretty settled, and this appears to have encouraged Constance to focus her energies on live work. Is it fair to say that the PSKB experience is weighted towards performance rather than recording? "They're probably equally as important," she opines. "I use live recordings as source material, which I'll then cut up, mess about with. *For The Blood* [Chocolate Monk CD-R, 2007] was a big mash up of several live shows. Also, releasing stuff keeps things going for those poor people in faraway places that can't make it to your gigs. But performing can have a special intimacy. And it's a good social event." How important is this social aspect to the growth of the noise scene? Isn't it a bit odd how such an outwardly extreme, even hostile form of music could have spawned such a touchy-feely mutual-admiration network? "I don't know about any scene, but there are definitely people from all over the world whom I admire, love hanging out and playing shows with," she riposts. "There are a lot of good people out there, making great sounds. Maybe the media pick up on a scene because they are just starting to take notice of events like No Fun and Subcurrant, and that's easier for you lazy journalists, right?"

Constance's prickliness rears its head again as I fumblingly attempt to characterise Polly Shang as a primal, outsider outfit in contrast with the more considered electronic noise strategies both of her solo work and her other main project Blood Stereo. "I don't use the term 'outsider' to describe what I do in the same way that art critics label some painting by a tramp or a mental patient," she replies. "To me it's just something raw and pretty 'out'." I try to press the point by explaining that I get the sense that Polly Shang is more gestural, almost ritualistic, suggesting that it could operate without electronics, for example. Constance absolutely disagrees. "I've done recordings and performances with Blood Stereo which have just been vocals. We played an amazing show in Antwerp in June with (Belgian Fluxus performance artist) Ludo Mich, just the three of us on stage with a microphone each, that was animalistic and joyous for sure. We are in the process of recording an LP with him. But I can't imagine a Polly Shang Kuen Band album made without electronics. There might be a lot of vocals on there, but there's a lot of crackle too." ☐ *The* Polly Shang Kuen Band *LP is out soon on Ultra Eczema*

Polly Shang Kuan Band (left to right)
Karen Constance, Maureen Farrell, Maya Victoria Kjellstrand

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Student of decay
By Nick Cain

Robert Horton with his invention "the boot"

Robert Horton

Robert Horton's colourful career stretches back nearly 30 years from his involvement in the early days of San Francisco punk, to his activities in the 80s cassette underground to intensive bursts of recording throughout the 90s and early noughties But, until recently, he had released nothing in 15 years During 2003 and 2004 Horton began to sense sympathetic stirrings in the contemporary underground Encouraged by Charalambides guitarist Tom Carter whom he met at a Jack Rose concert and who has since become one of his most frequent collaborators, he began to make contact with labels he sensed to be kindred spirits

His first solo set *Angel Humming Through A Wire* was released in 2005, and a deluge has followed 29 albums, 13 of them solo, the remainder documenting his activities in a bewildering array of groups and collaborations. "I started hearing music that was made by folks younger than me – like Neil Campbell and Vibracathedral Orchestra], Skaters, Kemalliset Ystävät, Davenport Charalambides, Birchville Cat Motel," Horton explains "I thought Oh, there are people out there who would like what I was doing in the 1980s with Plateau Ensemble and my current stuff as well"

That's no idle boast Although the bulk of his recent solo releases was recorded in the last decade, *ISM 1979–1990* and *Plateau 1985–88* cover the late 70s and 80s solo and in noise-punk group ISM and Plateau a solo project that eventually developed into The Plateau Ensemble On both albums the blend of outward-bound improv elongated drones and queasy loops sounds intriguingly contemporary And along with *Warmth 1987* a recently unearthed solo recording The Plateau Ensemble's drone based compositions document Horton's engagement with minimalist traditions, a good ten years before the genre's mid 90s renaissance

Drones constitute a thread that runs through much of his discography Horton acknowledges the reference but adds "There is a humorous paradox in that I am a throw in the kitchen sink kind of guy I love multiple layers of totally different stuff going on Probably I get this from both tape music and Charles Ives, and John Fahey's musique concrète So minimalism, yes but in so many multi-dimensional layers that you get a thick winter stew"

The approach makes his solo recordings elusive and allusive affairs In addition to American Primitive guitar and concrète, tropes loosely derived from idioms as diverse as noise, folk, psychedelic rock and electroacoustic composition intermittently appear conflated by Horton into laminally dense and texturally rich assemblages of sound The approach is illustrated by recent solo recordings like *First Light, Dirt Speak* and *Diamond-Beak-Hornet-Hell* on which Horton stitches undulating drones treated field recordings, electronic manipulations, oscillating loops and improvisations on found or non-musical objects and self-built instruments into slowly shifting, lattice-like patterns

Horton has constructed more than a dozen instruments among them the 'boot' a four-stringed dobro-like instrument, and the airpump trumpet, a bicycle pump hooked up to a trumpet. "[The influence of] Harry Partch got me to make my own instruments," Horton explains "I made them when I was in the punk band The Appliances so the wood and many of the parts were found on the streets Partch also got me into different tunings I was not a guitar player who started building instruments," he clarifies "I am a self-taught 'boot' player"

Horton's 80s recordings both solo and in Plateau Ensemble, were chronicled on a series of cassettes The 90s were ostensibly a less fertile decade. "I kept making music," he explains, "but stopped getting it out In the early 90s I had an intense illness, a business that went bankrupt and I had a year of depression when I didn't do much" After recording solo for much of the decade, in the late 90s Horton began to involve himself in various diverse collaborations Beautiful Friend, a song-oriented duo with vocalist Les Shimmin; Infinite Article with Edward Guerriero (which Horton describes as "songs, mostly covers, in concrète electroacoustical construction"); and Attemptations with vocalist Lon Huber ("noir concrete involving massive cut-up and layering, improvising with environments").

He currently works in a plethora of groups with Michael Shannon as Broken Mask (drone-dominated soundscapes), with Dan Plonsey in free jazz/drone duo Imperfect Masters in Turnstone (with Shannon and Tom Carter) Sky City (with Carter, Lisa Cameron and Leann Cameron) and "psychedelic hillbilly microtonal" song duo Microblind Harvestmen with Hal Hughes. Not forgetting another solo project Egghatcher and a slew of on-hold and one-off groupings Mudsuckers (with Carter and Yellow Swans) Eastern *Fox* Squirrels, Oppen (with Alex Cobb of Taige Remains), Dream Years (with Honey Owens of Jackie O Motherfucker), and Future Ears with Plonsey and saxophonist Henry Kuntz ("free jazz/noise – very intense meant to rattle the house")

Most of them have been or are about to be documented, but like his solo releases, are typically released as CD-Rs by small labels – like Students Of Decay Musicyourmindwillloveyou and Foxglove – in editions which infrequently scrape past the three-figure mark Of those still in print three succinctly demonstrate the diversity of Horton's aesthetic Kyrgyz a quartet with Loren Chasse and Christina Boapple of Jewelled Antler Collective and Tom Carter, whose 2006 debut gracefully merged its members respective aesthetics, his duo with Carter, which has produced two heavy droning albums, most recently *Steeljaguar For Rocket*; and Horton's *Pablo Feldman Sun Riley* collaboration with Dax Pierson of Subtle "Dax and I started with a conceptual framework, we wanted to create a music that used elements of Augustus Pablo and Morton Feldman – two very different musicians but we both perceived an unlikely similarity in their sounds." The albums beguiling organ and melodica duets obliquely invoke the spirits of Pablo and Feldman, as well as its other titular devotees, Sun Ra and Terry Riley but sounds beholden to none of them

All three blend notated playing composition and improvisation with any boundaries separating them blurred through computer editing "I don't really see any difference between composing, improvising, editing, reprovising," Horton explains. "They are all different ways of sound selection from the total sound spectrum I use improvisation sometimes in its pure form, sometimes with preset forms with written or verbal guidelines Over the last few years I've used improvisation as a way to create a structure for composition and then added overdubs and other parts to bring out the form that is already there"

Horton's prolific release schedule shows no signs of abating On the horizon are two solo albums, a third duo with Carter, Kyrgyz's sophomore effort, Sky City's debut and Microblind Harvestmen and Infinite Article releases But Horton is unconcerned that he might be flooding the market "since most of my releases are CD-Rs with very small runs, I'm not really worried And this is only the tiniest drop in the bucket of what there is!" he jokes. ☐ Diamond-Beak-Hornet-Hell *is out now on Gold Sounds*; Pablo Feldman Sun Riley *is out now on AA/Nosordo www hoalrecords com*

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Global Ear Ulaanbaatar

Jazz is the teacher bringing Improv practices back to the Mongolian capital's community of traditional, expat and visiting musicians. By Steve Tromans

The U-Bop Band

Mongolia's capital city Ulaanbaatar (Red Hero in English) was given its current name in 1924, following the routing of the occupying Chinese forces and the establishment of the socialist Mongolian People's Republic. This resulted in 76 years of isolation from the non-Soviet world and a programme of communist sanctioned indoctrination in the field of the arts. Mongolian traditional music was preserved as a folk art and kept in stasis, while music students were also encouraged to study instruments from the symphonic orchestra. Since the collapse of the republic in 1990 and its emergence from behind the Iron Curtain, Mongolia has been overwhelmed by Western pop culture and the music of choice for many young, urban Mongols is American hiphop and rock. A large number of Mongolian rappers and rockers have sprung out of nowhere, with the national television channels dominated by their faces and music.

The sprawling, Soviet-built capital is home to two-thirds of Mongolia's entire population. With a total of just under 2.5 million, it has the lowest population density of any country of the world. Many still lead a nomadic existence out in the wilds, raising livestock, living a life little changed since the time of the Great Mongolian Empire ruled by Chinggis Khean (better known in the West as Genghis Khan).

The jazz/improv scene is very much in its infancy. Improvisation did not fit the mandate of the socialists and was strongly discouraged in musical education. This has lamentably continued into post-1990s culture. Finding musicians who have the aptitude to improvise is no easy feat, but they do exist. The Arts Council of Mongolia put me in touch with N Ganbat, a middle-aged Mongolian pianist/drummer and the Chairman of the Giant Steppes of Jazz NGO, a non-profit organisation specially formed to organise Mongolia's first ever jazz festival – the Giant Steppes Jazz Festival – which took place at the beginning of October 2006.

Ganbat and I began our association by forming The U-Bop Band along with Colombian American bass player and khoomei singer Andrew Colwell. Khoomei is the Mongolian shamanic art of overtone singing, where a low fundamental plus a high-pitched harmonic are formed by a somewhat mysterious manipulation of the tongue and vocal chords. The singing technique is used by Mongolian shamans to bridge the gap between the spiritual and physical world, with the low fundamental representing the physical plane and the otherworldly whistle of the overtones, that of the spirit world. Andrew learnt his khoomei from a collection of singers, who hail from Chandman Sum in north western Mongolia. Regarded as the centre of khoomei singing, it's a place of annual pilgrimage for its practitioners every summer, when the khoomei naadam (festival) takes place.

Since his background is in improvisation, Colwell has become crucial to the development of the jazz/improv scene since taking up residence in Ulaanbaatar. Equally crucial has been the opportunity to perform every Friday night at a restaurant called Melodyl, where the audience has been a satisfying mix of Mongolians, tourists and expats. Since June 2006, it has provided Ulaanbaatar with its first ever 100 per cent jazz night.

Things move fast in Ulaanbaatar. The second breakthrough came with Ganbat's suggestion of an Ulaanbaatar jazz academy. Within a month, an arrangement had been made for us to use a room over the summer, and, kitted out with a blackboard and a couple of pianos, I began teaching the basics of jazz theory, practice and history to a small group of Mongolian pianists. This eventually expanded to include two violinists, a khuurchir player (a small, two stringed Mongolian instrument with a clear harmonically rich tone) and a bayan player (a type of button accordion, developed in Russia during the early 20th century and popular in Mongolia). Since lessons began, the students' improvisational abilities have blossomed. One memorable moment from early December was an extended improvised duet by Oyunchimeg, one of the violinists, and Soyolmaa, the khuurchir player. After some initial encouragement, these two classically trained, novice improvisors produced around 20 minutes of exceptionally focused musical dialogue.

Over at Melodyl things have continued to develop nicely, with guest artists now forming an enjoyable part of weekly proceedings. Since its formation in summer 2006, The U-Bop Band has performed alongside many foreign and Mongolian artists, including a Canadian vocalist, a French Canadian folk violinist, two separate sets of travelling circus mime artists/jugglers (passing through Mongolia on their way to China), an American blues harmonica player, a mixed group of German and Mongolian khoomei singers, Degi, famous throughout Mongolia for her electric violin playing, vocalists Ariuna, Undrakh, Khulan and Naran, and pianist Puravsukh. The academy's star pupil, Puravsukh is heavily influenced by his heroes Oscar Peterson and Michel Petrucciani, and his guest spots on Fridays are one of the highlights of the night's music.

The main plan for 2007 is the Jazz And Traditional Mongolian Music Summer Camp, which will take place during the months of June, July and August this year. Set in a ger camp (the ger is the Mongolian traditional dwelling) in the beautiful and remote region of Arzat in Huandain Am, 35 kilometres east of Ulaanbaatar, this promises to be a popular event with many jazz instructors already expressing an interest in coming over to teach alongside traditional Mongolian instrument teachers.

Ulaanbaatar is not an easy place to live. It is dirty and polluted during the long winter months, and it's constantly on the brink of a social and political crisis, but, with a little hard work and dedication, and the support of like-minded Mongols, a lot can be achieved by these enterprising people in a short space of time. In this land of the steppes, the wide-open Mongolian musical mentality is ideal for soaking up the immense amount of musical information previously denied it and to present its own take on the future of 21st century music. ☐

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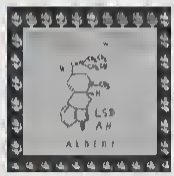

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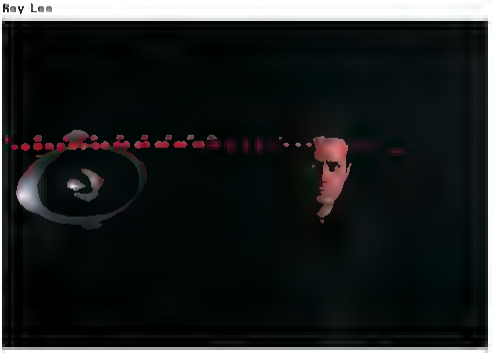
Cross Platform Sound in other media

Day of the tripods: Ray Lee's *Siren*

Ray Lee



The whirling blades of Ray Lee's forest-like sound installations evoke the mysteries of music from the aether. By Julian Cowley

"It's not just about making sound," says Oxford based sound artist Ray Lee. "It's about making something that creates that sound." In dimly lit vaults beneath London Bridge railway station, Lee is discussing his kinetic sound sculptures. This secretive and atmospheric space, segmented by a series of arches, is a venue for his current performance piece *Siren*, which involves 29 tripods topped with revolving blades. Each blade is equipped with an electronic tone generator, small loudspeakers and light emitting diodes. "It's very important to me that I build them all," Lee continues. "I know how the oscillator is made, because I built it. With digital technology we are so far removed from the means of production."

Performing *Siren*, Lee and his associate Harry Dawes dress in heavy felt suits that make them look like industrial operatives, use screwdrivers to tune each oscillator to an Aeolian mode and set the blades whirling. The tones accumulate into a pulsing choral drone, coloured brilliantly with overtones and disclosing different facets as listeners wander through the arched space. The play of lights is visually mesmerising too. Although Lee values an empirical hands-on approach to the practice of sound art the real impetus for his work remains intangible. "You turn on the radio and something appears," he says. "For me there's still a kind of magic involved in that. Play the theremin, moving your hand through an invisible field and you're shaping sound. Something physically there that you can't see. There's a sort of fascination in that, for me, and a magic which science doesn't manage to explain out of existence. You can do things with magnetism and radio waves that still have this sense of mystery." During the tuning process glissandi are heard that may evoke, in the underground shelter of the vaults, wartime air raid sirens. *Siren*'s title and the piece's alluring sonic texture allude also to the sirens of ancient myth. Lee steers skilfully amongst associations of danger and seduction, practicality and enchantment.

In the mid-1990s Lee and Dawes toured as improvising musicians. Seeking a wider audience for their piano and trombone duet, they framed it as theatrical performance. "Playing improvised music is intrinsically interesting to watch," Lee says. "We thought if we made theatre out of the production of music, it might have a life of its own that we could sustain through small-scale arts centre and theatre touring. Some of our installation and sculptural ideas started to come into it, and films. At that time we came across the theremin – the ultimate visual instrument. We had some made and started playing them."

After a London gig they were approached by Lydia Kavina, protégée of Leon Thérémin, the instrument's inventor, and its most virtuosic exponent. Although they were total novices, she invited them to a conference in Moscow, part of the theremin centenary celebrations, where they met leading authorities on early electronic music. "We saw this instrument in the Moscow Conservatory where Théremin used to teach," Lee recalls. "He'd built it to demonstrate different temperaments to students, a simple two octave electronic keyboard, but each key had a seperate dial and loudspeaker, so you could individually tune each note. I wanted to make something like that. What I've done in *Siren* is to separate out the tones and they all spin. Seeing that instrument in Moscow was an inspiration for making individual oscillators that you can tune and build into a complex chord."

But *Siren* has not sprung straightforwardly from an idea. In Lee's characteristic fashion it has evolved through trial and error, intuition and an improvisor's willingness to turn accident to advantage. In 2000 he was making sound machines in a disused textile mill in Derbyshire. The nature of the site suggested spinning machines so he built a tripod with a small motor at the top and put a metal arm on it that would spin round. A battery powered circuit attached to the arm generated a tone transmitted through loudspeakers. Lee was surprised by the outcome and built four more tripods for a piece he called *The Theremin Lesson*. His intention was to activate them using his MIDI theremin. But a driver he had made to activate switches blew up just before the initial presentation and he had to do the job manually. So that has become part of the performance.

The following year he presented *Choir* at Oxford's Museum of Modern Art. It used 16 tripods and its sound had assumed oddly vocal qualities, like some strange transmutation of Ligeti's *Lux Aeterna*.

"I arrived at the sound by chance," Lee remarks, "by a circuitous and labour intensive route. I didn't know I was going to do this. It grew through discovery." In 2004 Lee was working in a disused hangar at a former airbase in Oxfordshire. It was through that site's associations that the title *Siren* first emerged. It was staged in Utrecht as part of a multimedia festival before arriving at London Bridge where the particular acoustic qualities of each of those heavy brick arches lend it new richness. "In these arches you get pulsing," Lee observes. "In the hangar you got more of a wash of sound, a forest of tripods stretching ahead of you. Here they are separated out, as a member of the audience you have to move around, navigating your own route visually and acoustically." ☐ *A reconfigured version of* Siren *will be installed at Kinetica Museum in London's Old Spitalfields Market, 15–29 March.*

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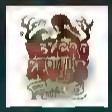

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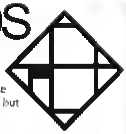

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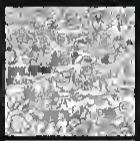

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Invisible Jukebox Rachid Taha

Every month we play a musician a series of records which they are asked to identify and comment on – with no prior knowledge of what they're about to hear. Tested by Dan Warburton. Photography: Sébastien Agnetti

Born in Oran, Algeria, in 1958, singer Rachid Taha moved to France at the age of ten, settling eventually in Lyon. In 1980, with the brothers Mohamed and Mokhtar Amini, Eric Vaquer and Djamel Dif, he formed the group Carte De Sejour (meaning Resident Permit), whose post-punk cocktail of rock and reggae paved the way for the multi-ethnic French pop explosion of La Mano Negra and Les Negresses Vertes. Carte De Séjour's 1984 debut album *Rhorhomanie* was produced by ex-Gong guitarist Steve Hillage, and marked the beginning of a working relationship with Taha that continues to this day. The group's most notorious succès de scandale came in 1986 with their version of Charles Trenet's patriotic chestnut "Douce France". Since the group split up in 1989 – "We fell apart in Berlin at the same time as the Wall," Taha smiles – the singer has pursued a successful solo career, from the street smart Arab groove of *Barbès* via the ethno-Techno of *Dje Olé* to the affectionate homage to the chaâbi singing of Dahmane El Harrachi and Mohamed El Anka on 1998's *Diwân*. This return to his roots was further strengthened by a high profile collaboration with raï stars Cheb Khaled and Faudel (1999's *1, 2, 3 Soleils/1, 2, 3 Suns*), a million pound extravaganza Hillage conceived as an "Arab equivalent of the Three Tenors". This was followed by a period of extensive touring, including an appearance at WOMAD in Spain in 2002, and the release of the infectiously rocky *Tékitoi* (*Who You?*) on which the singer was joined by Hillage, Brian Eno and Christian Dlivier (Têtes Raides) for, among other things, a rambunctious cover of The Clash's "Rock The Casbah".

The Jukebox took place at Taha's delightfully cluttered flat in the Parisian suburb of Les Lilas as the singer was preparing for his forthcoming appearance at the Bataclan, Paris, to showcase *Diwân 2*, another Hillage-produced 'primer' of Arab culture featuring reworkings of material by Mohamed Mazouni, Abdel Halim Hafez and Oum Kalsoum.

Marcel Mouloudji
"Un Jour Tu Verras"
FROM *AUTO PORTRAIT* (UNIVERSAL) 1954

Oh là là! I have to guess what this is? [Voice enters] Oh, that's Mouloudji [sings along, imitating perfectly]. You know. Marcel Mouloudji was the first French singer to be censored in France, when he sang Borie Viens anti-war song "Le Deserteur" [on 8 May 1954, the same day the French lost Diên Biên Phu in Vietnam]. His father was Kabyle, from Sidi Aich in Algeria. Marcel Mouloudji was one of the first, with Edith Piaf. One of the elders. One of the classic French singers. He was an actor too, on the stage and screen. I haven't heard this for a long time. I should go back to him more often.

He also produced the first French free jazz album, François Tusques's *Free Jazz*, in 1966.

Is that right? He never got the acclaim he deserved, I think.

Did you ever meet him? You would have had a lot in common.

No, but I played a concert a long time ago with Carte De Séjour and he was on the bill. That must have been back in 1982. You know, there was even controversy when he died, because [far right politician Jean-Marie] Le Pen came to the funeral. That caused quite a stir, I can tell you.

He wanted to prove how 'integrated' he was.

Who, Le Pen or Mouloudji? [laughs]

Archie Shepp
"Brotherhood At Ketchaoua"
FROM *LIVE AT THE PAN AFRICAN FESTIVAL* (BYG ACTUEL) 1969

It's Gnawa. It's like Bo Diddley! It's exactly the same thing. Bo Diddley was a black man, a slave in the United States, and the Gnawa – the word comes from Ghana – were slaves in North Africa. Listen. See what I mean? [Listens] I think I know this. There's an American jazzman playing along. What's his name. Shit. You know, he used to wear funny hats.

A lot of them did.

Archie Shepp, that's it.

This is from 1969. Do you have any memories of those turbulent times?

Not really. [Listens intently] You know, this is pretty intellectual stuff. And Gnawa for me is. There's a religious side to it that I don't like much. They talk about the Prophet, they sing verses from the Koran. It's OK for you when you're on holiday in Morocco and buy a cassette of it as a souvenir, but when I listen to it I hear the religion. Gnawa's got quite popular now, but that whole folklore, touristy side of it annoys me. There's a petit-bourgeois side to it, intello-bourgeois. It's not kids from working class families that can afford to go to Essaouira and discover it.

Dashiell Hedayat
"Chrysler"
FROM *OBSOLETE* (SHANDAR) 1971

[Listens carefully, repeats a line of the lyric] *"Deux de ses roues sont volées"* [*"Two of the wheels are stolen"*] Is this a French group?

Partly. It came out on Shender in 1971. The singer is Dashiell Hedayat. His real name is Daniel Théron. He translated Bob Dylan's novel *Tarantula* into French.

I don't know him at all. Are there any Moroccans in the band?

No, but there's Pip Pyle and Daevid Allen.

Yes, I thought about Gong. It also reminded me of that other famous French group, with the drummer, umm... what's his name.

Magma?

Yes.

You started out as a drummer, right?

I didn't have a drum kit, though [laughs]. I didn't have a record player either. I listened to the radio a lot. I heard a lot of music in clubs: a lot of soul, funk R&B, James Brown. Records were expensive too. Back then if you wanted to make music, you had to have the money for instruments and a place to rehearse. When I moved to Lyon and met Mohamed and Mokhtar [Amini, of Carte De Séjour] in 1979 we had a little attic where we played. It's got more democratised now with rap, because all you need is a couple of turntables. But back in the 70s the groups were all petit bourgeois. Unlike England where it's working class folk who make the music.

How did your parents react to your choice of career?

We didn't talk about it much. They were happy as long as I was earning a living, and the police weren't kicking down the door. They probably would have preferred it if I'd been a doctor or something. But the way the housing market is today in France you can't afford to live properly even if you have a job. The working class has been completely pushed aside.

Jean-Claude Vannier
"L'Enfant Au Royaume Des Mouches"
("The Child In The Kingdom Of Flies")
FROM *L'ENFANT ASSASSIN DES MOUCHES* (*THE CHILD FLY KILLER*) (SUZELLE) 1972

Don't know this at all. [Laughs when music changes] Oh, la vache! [Drums along] This is really 70s. No voices? It sounds like Pulsar, one of those crazy groups.

Rachid Taha in Paris, February 2007

It's by Jean-Claude Vannier
Oh, the guy who did the arrangements for [Serge] Gainsbourg. I didn't know he'd made a disc. I knew Vannier's arrangements, but not this. This is incredible.
Was Gainsbourg important for you?
What I liked about him was... he was like Bowie, he took a bit of this and a bit of that. He was smart. But that colour, that rock opera colour on [1971's *Histoire De*] *Melody Nelson*, that was created by Vannier too. [Listens] This is like a journey. Music is like a journey for me. When I write I travel, I start in Africa, cross the Straits of Gibraltar into Andalusia. Sometimes I end up in South America.
When you write, what comes first?
The rhythm. Then the words and then you paint the wall with colours. That's the arrangement.

Steve Hillage
"The Dervish Riff"
FROM *LIVE HERALD* (VIRGIN) 1979

[Listens to entire track] This is one of those pieces that goes on forever. Is it Steve? I met Steve in '82 or '83. We were very Anglo-Saxon in our tastes back then: we were into The Clash, The Who, Zeppelin, all that. With Carte De Séjour we were looking for a producer who was eclectic, who had a broad musical vision. Steve Hillage fit the bill. He had that Prog rock background, and he'd done an album where he covered Oum Kalsoum ["The Glorious Om Riff" on 1978's *Green*], so we didn't have to explain North African music to him because he knew right where we were coming from. And he spoke good French. His wife's French. It was that universal colour he had that interested me, and it still interests me 23 years later. That's why we're still working together. The only other producer who interested me at the time, who I later ended up working with too, was Brian Eno. I want people whose music goes outside their little neighbourhood. Music is a journey. I wanted a traveller, a troubadour. Funny how a lot of the musicians of Steve's generation, the baba cools [hippies], smoking joints and stuff, ended up in Techno. Because Techno is basically Prog rock, shamanic, Indians dancing around fires.

The Clash
"Brand New Cadillac"
FROM *LONDON CALLING* (CBS) 1979

[Instantly] Wah! The Clash, "Cadillac." [starts singing along and then stops the CD player abruptly]. Back in '82 when we did a rough version of our first record, we wanted The Clash to produce it. I went to see them at the Mogador in Paris, and I gave them the demo cassette and then heard nothing. We ended up doing a four track EP on Mosquito produced by Bernard Mayat, a French guy, instead. It's funny 20 years on that I met Mick Jones and Paul Simonon and did a version of "Rock The Casbah" ["Rock El Casbah" on *Takitoi*].
Would you describe this as punk?
No, this is rock 'n' roll, not punk. Joe Strummer was a rocker, more like Elvis or Gene Vincent. Or Vince Taylor, who wrote this song, "Brand New Cadillac". I love Vince Taylor. The man in leather, the dandy. A real rocker. There was another great rock singer in France too, who is dead now, called Victor Lazlo, who was Algerian, a Kabyle [real name Laid Hamani]. I like that attitude. I like the wild side of it, the marginal side of it. I grew up with all that, the Elvis films, Bollywood... Indian cinema was very present in Northern Africa. You lot are just discovering Bollywood now – we had it 40 years ago.

Punk for me was a fashion parade. It was a rip-off, invented and radio-controlled by neo-bourgeois English like Malcolm McLaren. There was something Warholesque about it all. It was like an advertising slogan. It didn't last very long. Yeah, in England there was an explosion of the working class: kids who couldn't play anything but who wanted to do something. But they soon fell in line. French punk was petit bourgeois. You needed money to go to England... or find out what was going on there. Working class kids and immigrant kids in France were more into soul music.

Charles Trenet
"Un Air Qui Vient De Chez Nous"
("A Tune From Home")
FROM *LA MER* (EMI) 1945

[Instantly] That's Trenet. One of the great French writer-poets, one of the first to mix jazz and chanson. Scintillating. But the bloke himself makes me want to throw up. He was quite racist, saying the only thing black people had ever done was climb down from the trees, things like that. Not the kind of bloke I wanted to hang out with.
That jingoism certainly comes out in some of his lyrics. Why did you choose to cover "Douce France" with Carte De Séjour?
Well, we nearly chose "Maréchal Nous Voilà". I knew it was going to stir shit up, that people wouldn't be indifferent. It's a bit like The Sex Pistols doing "My Way". When you criticise Trenet, you're attacking a French monument. "Douce France" is a political song, it was written in 1942. So it was ironic that a group of Arabs should cover it. It was our answer to the anti-immigrant policy there was at the time and we distributed copies of the single to all the French Members of Parliament. [Then French Minister of Culture] Jack Lang knew Trenet, and he knew our record company, so we gave him a box of discs to give out. A lot of people heard it, but it wasn't broadcast a lot. Commercial radio stations wouldn't play it. We knew it had sold more than other records in the Top 40 but it wasn't listed in the Top 40. Strange, eh? And even now it's as if Carte De Séjour has been written out of history. There was a programme on TV recently on French pop in the 1980s and we weren't mentioned at all. But we were the first mixed ethnic group. La Mano Negra and Négresses Vertes came later. Carte De Séjour was the first. A lot of people forget that. And you find La Mano and the Negresses in the 'rock français' section, but you won't find Carte De Séjour.
I notice that in the big record shops here in Paris you're in the World Music bin, not variété française or rock français. How do you feel about that?
When your stuff's in a shop it has to be filed under something in the computer. I suppose the guy sees 'Rachid Taha' and automatically files it under World Music, without even opening the box. Anyway, I don't listen to much French music anymore. I like the old stuff. Leo Ferre – he had some great arrangements – Alain Bashung, stuff like that. Joe Dassin. I like the Country side of it, but I don't listen to much French stuff. Sounds beautiful, World Music, doesn't it? [Sighs]

Cheb Khaled & Safy Boutelle
"Chebba'
FROM *KUTSCHE* (SONY) 1988

[Sings along] This is still the greatest rai disc. I love the production by Martin Meissonnier and Safy Boutelle. Khaled, what a great voice. We did *1, 2, 3 Soleil* with Faudel in 1999, with Steve Hillage and an Egyptian orchestra, North African rhythms. You have to realise that the Egyptians aren't all that familiar with that kind of rhythm – an Algerian can play 'oriental' [Egyptian] but an Egyptian can't play rai. Rai comes from Oran, the west of Algeria, it's really a shepherd's song, a song of solitude. The language is very Algerian, very much from the earth, a kind of slang – rai means 'my opinion' – you have to know to understand what they're talking about. My father can understand it perfectly, but I used to have problems, because there's a way to turn a phrase, a use of words that's very difficult to master. But when you listen carefully there are a lot of love songs, songs about sex, things that are taboo. It was the song of drunkards, marginals. You didn't hear it on the radio. Raï was always a communitarian kind of thing.
You say 'was'.
Well, it fell flat on its face because it didn't evolve, nobody worked to make it evolve. Rai's always been something of a curiosity in France. Rai singers don't reinvent themselves, they become kind of institutions. They're not actually claiming anything politically. They're variété [French pop] singers. It's cabaret, not culture. There's no political thought behind it.
And that's important for you.
Yes, because when you're in music, you see what's

going on around you and you want things to evolve. You don't just want to be a singer, an entertainer. Being a musician, being an artist is about changing things, putting your finger on a problem. I wouldn't go so far as to say you have a mission, but you do have a responsibility, because members of the public read your interviews and come to see you, to listen to you. You become a kind of intermediary between them and the media. Not everybody gets the chance to access the media, so when it's given to you, you want to talk about what hurts. You're not going to sit about talking about cookery. The media is a weapon. Think of all the concerts during the apartheid era in South Africa, think of Woody Guthrie, Bob Dylan, protest songs. That's important.

How does that link to *Diwân 2*, where you go back to your roots in Arab culture?

Going back to my roots is also a political act. I want people to discover this culture because I'm fed up hearing about Islamism, fundamentalism, as if being Arab means being a fundamentalist or a terrorist, as if we were some kind of killer robots, some kind of monsters, that we can't experience pleasure in life, can't enjoy making love.

So why did you die your hair blond on the cover of *Ole Olé*?

That was a way of denouncing fascism, representing myself as a kind of Nazi. Just prior to that I did a piece called "Voila Voilà", talking about the far right. In case they didn't understand the lyrics I thought they might understand an image.

The Stooges
"TV Eye"
FROM *FUN HOUSE* (ELEKTRA) 1970

What's he saying?

Oh, if I tell you that I'll give the title away.

He's not French, is he?

Is he hell!

Is it The Ramones?

Ah, not far off...

Oh it's Iggy Pop. I love this kind of sound, totally tribal. Like I was saying earlier, the rhythm. I thought you might play some Suicide. I'm a big Suicide fan not just for Alan Vega's voice, but also for the rhythm. Great. Next.

Abd Al Malik
"Le Grand Frère"
FROM *GIBRALTAR* (ATMOSPHÉRIQUES) 2001

This is good. [Drums along] This is very close to what I'm doing. Don't know who it is. Oh yes I do, it's Abd Al Malik, of course. Slam. Not bad. Slam is improvising a text, freestyle. It reminds me of some of the stuff I did with Carte De Séjour.

Why did French rap latch on to American gangsta stereotypes instead of going back to its African and Arab roots?

Because that's what you see most on television. Blacks in France identify with blacks in America. Or they think they do. But the situation here is nothing like what it is over there. In America it's like a civil war. It's like the 60s when European rockers tried to identify with American rockers. The dominant culture. You always think someone else's culture is better than your own. A lot of French rappers said shit about how rock was for white folk, and I said, what are you talking about? Rock started out as a *black* music. I told them they should start sampling people like Khaled instead of James Brown, and now they're starting to do it.

Are the kids in the projects listening to *Diwân 2*?

Yes, but you have to take it to them.

Oum Kalsoum
"Nabj Elborda"
FROM *IFTIAH YA DALBI* (SONY) 1931

That's psychedelic. Oum Kalsoum. Beautiful, eh? Whirling dervishes.

For *Diwân 2* you wanted that string sound...

That colour, yes... We did it in Cairo with Steve, who prepared everything in advance. The song of hers I covered, "Ghanni Li Shweya", comes from an Egyptian musical. I wanted to pay homage to the culture of my father. When I was little I didn't want to listen to classical Arabic music, it bored the hell out of me. You had to understand the words, which I didn't at the time. But I realise now how much a part of my culture it was.

But Egypt's some way from where you grew up.

Yes, but Egypt was like our America. On TV and radio it was what you heard. You were impregnated with it. And still, today, not a day goes by in all these countries when you don't hear Oum Kalsoum. From the Euphrates to North Africa. Every day. She was also a kind of ambassador for Gamal Abdel Nasser and that whole idea of the Arab nation. And Nasser was the idol of the Arab world. You can't seperate Oum Kalsoum from Nasser. He really understood the power of propaganda. Every Thursday he organised a concert for her on the radio, and the whole Arab world listened in. The last time she came to France – 1967, I think it was – it was at the Olympia, and the boss of the Olympia, Bruno Coquatrix, didn't know who she was. He thought there would be nobody there. He couldn't believe it when people turned up from all over the world. They came from all over. Dubai, Saudi Arabia, in private jets. La Callas turned up – she was a great fan of Oum Kalsoum. It was sold out many times over and people were offering to pay astronomical sums to get in. There's no equivalent in the Western world. Oum Kalsoum is the greatest star in the world because 500 million people listen to her every day. Can you imagine that? ☐ *Rachid Taha's* The Definitive Collection *is released next month on Wrasse.*

El Dabh with the Arussi Galla of Ethiopia 1963
Below El Dabh's signature

Rob Young travels across geopolitical space and time to the Egyptian capital of the early 1940s, where composer Halim El-Dabh constructed the world's first electronic tape piece from the recordings he made of an ancient healing ceremony

At Columbia Princeton Electronic Music Center May 1961 Left to right: Milton Babbitt (seated), Vladimir Ussachevsky, Charles Wuorinen, Otto Luening, Halim El Dabh and Bulent Arel with the RCA Sound Synthesizer

The voices emerge from out of a well, reverberating deep as time, a vulpine, moaned incantation, jiggered of pitch, silvered with overtones. The chants progress in a serpentine line, pausing occasionally for breath, then fade out after two minutes. What are we hearing? This is the substance of the first piece of electronic music ever composed, and of all the places in the world it could have originated from, it was created in a city which, according to Edward Said, "has something of the eternal about it", whose monuments connect us to the morning of civilization itself. For the cradle of electronica is Cairo.

Its birth father, Halim El-Dabh, is a bizarrely under-recognised figure of contemporary music, having lived a life that has taken him from Egypt to America, where he composed dance music for choreographer Martha Graham in the 50s, worked with Milton Babbitt, Vladimir Ussachevsky and Otto Luening at the groundbreaking Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in the 60s, undertook field trips into inhospitable zones of Ethiopia, the Congo and Zaire at the request of the Egyptian government to record and investigate the lost musics of Africa, and wrote a sequence of music that, from 1961 to the present day, has been performed every night as part of the Sound And Light show at the Pyramids of Giza on the outskirts of Cairo.

The official beginning of electronic music as a pure form is commonly pinned to the musique concrète of Pierre Schaeffer at Radio France in Paris, beginning with his *Études Des Bruits* in 1948. In fact, the first apparent instance of a musical 'opus', composed solely of electronically processed elements on tape (rather than a manuscript score that might include a part for an electric instrument), occurred in 1944, four years before Schaeffer began turning steam engine noise and salvaged organ pipes into a new do-re-mi (see *The Wire* 258).

In 1944 Halim El-Dabh, a 23 year old who had just graduated from agriculture college, was a frequent patron of the local YMCA, which was the focus of avant garde art and thought in the city. Brought there by one of his brothers, El-Dabh encountered characters such as Salama Musa, a socialist who advocated the embrace of European culture, novelist Nagib Mahfouz, and philosophers, painters, poets, composers and writers who were discovering and debating the fruits of modernism.

This was a Cairo in the throes of a debate about national identity. Egypt had been ruled by colonial powers since Napoleon's conquest at the end of the 18th century. It was in Ottoman hands for part of the 19th century; by the 1930s it was governed by an Egyptian monarchy and British High Commission working in parallel. Intellectual attitudes of the time hankered after the perceived certainties and stability of the nation's past under Islamic rule. At the same time, many argued, the benefits and innovations of the 'modernised' West could hold the key to Egypt being able to exist as an independent, self-governing state in the future. The tensions raised in this debate filtered from the political and economic sphere right through to the arts. At the historic Conference On Arabic Music, held in Cairo in 1932, discussions were held around such topics as "Should Arabic music adopt the violoncello and string bass?" and "Should Arab music abolish quarter tones?". Many Egyptian musicians, in fact, were eager to pursue 'Western' directions in music, while it was the European delegates who often called for the preservation of local traditions. In many respects, Halim El-Dabh's subsequent career would straddle and reconcile these schisms.

As an 11 year old (born in 1921), El-Dabh was already passionate about contemporary music and attended concerts during the 1932 Conference, where he heard Béla Bartók and Paul Hindemith performing their own works. At the same time, he saw music being recorded on a wire recorder, an early version of the tape recorder in which sounds could be captured on a spool of hair-thin steel wire. In 1942, he won first prize in a piano competition at the Egyptian Opera House. And in the mid-40s, El-Dabh was effectively

Once upon a time in Cairo

Hoda El-Dabh with tape recorder, circa 1960

kidnapped on various occasions by eccentric film director Husayn Halmy, and firmly 'invited' to compose music for his film *Roses And Thorns*.

But it was not only the cutting edge that fascinated El Dabh, he was also developing an interest in the sounds and rhythms of Egypt's ancient rites and circumcision rituals, which were still practised in remote sites around the country. These rituals typically involved rhythms pummelled out on drums, cymbals, even kitchen utensils, and the instruments often had objects attached in order to modify and distort the sounds they made. In particular he was intrigued by the zaar, a women-only ceremony in which spirits were summoned for the purpose of healing. In 1944, El Dabh and his friend, Kamal Iskender, hatched a plan to borrow one of the radio station's wire recorders, disguise themselves as women and infiltrate a zaar in order to record it. This recording, made in the middle of the night under the stars in the desert just outside Cairo, would form the raw material of the world's first ever electronic composition.

Halim El-Dabh is still alive, and I tracked him down to his home near Kent State University in Ohio, where he helped set up the Pan-African Studies faculty in 1969 and, by the time of his official 'retirement' in 1991, had been given rare University Professor status. At 86 years of age, he is as energetic and unpredictable as a ball of lightning, still living near the college and teaching as an Emeritus University Professor, composing feverishly, travelling and putting his chaotic archives in order with the help of various enthusiastic friends and students.

"I didn't think of it as electronic music, but just as an experience," he says, recalling the events of 1944. "It was an attraction to me, I felt an attraction beyond my reasoning. The zaar is a practice of healing, like an excitement of generating a vibration, and this vibration seems to penetrate. And then there is a transformation. Zeer means a visitation, and a visitation is like people bringing spirits to that location from all over the continent. These women, it doesn't matter how old they are, they'll almost be flying off their feet, up into the air. They have big darbukka drums and sometimes use flutes. They do a lot of incantations and their voices almost change in the process, and it's like different languages coming into being, and you feel as though you're on a different dimension, and all of a sudden you're lifted. Old women could be jumping way high off the floor! Gravity doesn't have much on you when you start that sound."

The exact date is now forgotten, but one evening just after sunset, at around 6pm, El Dabh and his friend loaded their equipment into a horse-drawn carriage (or hantour) and made the journey to the open courtyard where hundreds of women were assembling for a zaar. Finding no doorman, they walked in unchallenged, but soon, vainly attempting to conceal eight kilos of bulky recording gear under their burkhas, El Dabh and his friend were unmasked. "They beat me up," he chuckles. "But then they took pity on me. I said, 'Hey guys, I'm doing something good! And besides, I need healing!'"

"We got to meet the head woman, who decided we could stay after we talked to her. I think we must have stayed for about three hours, during which time we recorded the music."

El-Dabh now had several hours of magical sounds caught on his silvery reels. He returned to the Middle East Radio building and, in his words, "worked with it." With no clear aim other than to investigate the 'inner sound' of this transcendental ritual, he played back his wire recordings through the station's echo chambers, reverb and tone controls, isolating different harmonics by removing or enhancing certain frequencies and rerecording it in a huge reverberation chamber whose architecture could be physically altered. "The signal itself was pushed into a chamber and the walls could move," he explains. "I remember running down and moving a wall – it was a physical undertaking to really do that."

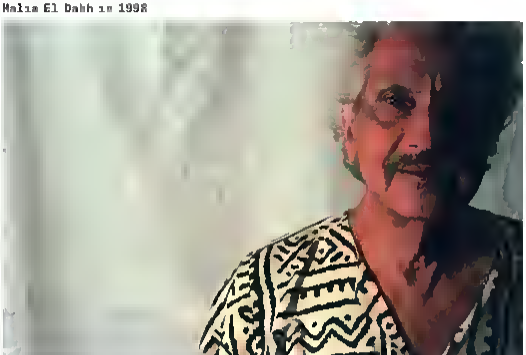
By transferring these mutated field recordings onto Philips reel-to-reel oxide tape, El-Dabh eventually created an edited 'composition' of around 25 minutes, which he called *Ta'ebir Al-Zeer* (*The Expression Of Zeer*). The piece was apparently played during a gallery event at the YMCA on one occasion, but it does not form part of El-Dabh's 'official' list of compositions and, bizarrely, does not even merit a mention in an otherwise exhaustive biography of his life written in 2003. It has never been released commercially, in full – this is partly due to the degraded and eroded quality of the surviving master tape – however, a two minute version, entitled *Wire Recorder Piece*, has appeared on a CD collection of El-Dabh's electronic music called *Crossing Into The Electric Magnetic*. Originally released in 2001 on the small label Without Fear, the disc will be reissued later this year in a new edition. It includes a selection of the compelling, heady, experimental electronic music El-Dabh produced during his sojourn at the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center in 1959: an *Electronic Fanfare* made with his friend Otto Luening; the mysterious, probing *Meditation In White Sound*; the thunderous theophany of *Element, Being And Primeval*; and the Luc Ferrari-like Ambient sound-landscape, *Venice*. But the short surviving fragment from the wire recorders still retains its ability to spook you: all sense of the recording as a real-time event is drained away and you are left with a feral howl in a reverberating pit, the voices stacked in unearthly harmonic relations. For El-Dabh, the purpose of creating the piece was to work out the fundamental vibrations that were being generated in the act of bodily transcendence and healing.

"For some reason I was always sensitive to this kind of sound," he says. "I watched the vibration of the birds, the many hawks that used to come. I used to meet a scarab that used to come at three o'clock in the morning. And that was like an electronic world in a beetle – that scarab would sit on my hand and make a noise, and I think the fact that he sits there is because maybe he actually feels the vibration of your thoughts."

In 1950, El-Dabh left Egypt for America: he had won a Fulbright scholarship. Ever the maverick, he turned down the opportunity to study music at the prestigious Juilliard, preferring to read composition at the University of New Mexico, which he hoped would bring him into closer proximity to the music and rituals of America's native peoples. Over the next decade he was gifted with a series of lucky breaks and introductions. At the Aspen Music Centre in Colorado, he briefly acted as assistant to his idol Stravinsky. In the mid-50s he moved to New York, the "chameleon city" described by Edward Said as being attractive to the non-native because "you can be anywhere in it and still not be of it". He found himself hanging out with the likes of John Cage, Henry Cowell and Leopold Stokowski, meeting electronic composers Vladimir Ussachevsky and Otto Luening and being invited to work at the fledgling Electronic Music Center at Columbia-Princeton, and being asked to write the music for Martha Graham's ballets such as *Clytemnestra* (1958), *One More Gaudy Night* (1961) and *A Look At Lightning* (1962). The last piece was particularly appropriate, given that El-Dabh himself had been struck by a lightning bolt in 1955. "I was numb for a month on my right side," he says now. "But my wife said, 'There's a voice that came out of you that shook up the whole place.' And I think that voice, whatever vibration it had, probably protected me."

El-Dabh has made the USA his home, but in 1960 he returned temporarily to Egypt, at the invitation of the minister of culture of the United Arab Republic (a

Halim El Dabh in 1998



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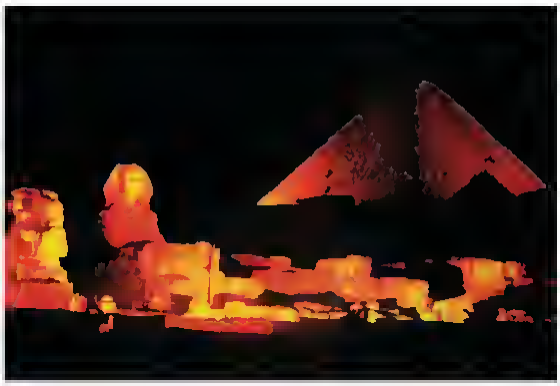
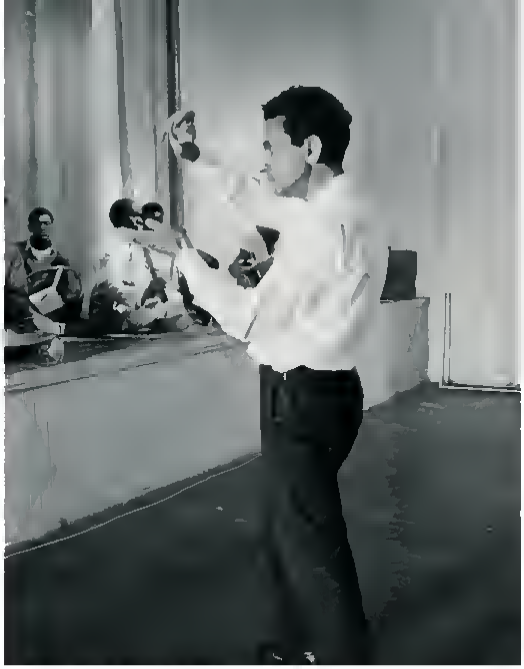


El-Dabh's music continues to soundtrack Giza's nightly Sound And Light show



El-Dabh with Orchestra Ethiopia

brief alliance of Egypt and Syria that ended in 1962) He was given a post in the ministry and charged with the job of collecting and preserving Egyptian folk and traditional music. From his office, complete with piano, overlooking the Pyramids at Giza, he arranged a houseboat that would convey him and his family down the Nile. This working cruise yielded a rich crop of recordings, made on portable reel to reel tape recorders hooked up by long wires back to the boat offshore, of music from Upper Egypt and Nubia in northern Sudan – recording often right inside the homes of local villagers. This project was the prelude to a larger scheme known as Castles Of Music the cream of musicians in each of Egypt's provinces were convened at a festival in front of an international audience

Many of El-Dabh's compositions – he has written scores for all kinds of instrumental ensembles, solos and orchestral combinations – pertain to his experience as an African. There is an early piano piece called *Meditation On The Nile*, and a later masterpiece for the same instrument, *Mekta' In The Art Of Kite'* (1955), based on a variant of Egyptian philosophical poetry that explores the part (mekta') in relation to the whole (kite'). This piece, involving complex dissonances designed to create a "curving of sound", is thus deeply embedded in the language and culture of Egypt

For this reason and owing to the fame he had already achieved during his time in the US, Egypt s President Nasser invited El-Dabh to compose music for the Sound And Light project a nightly display projected onto the Pyramids that has been performed at Giza every day since 1961. Gaston Papaloux, creator of the son et lumière spectacle at the Palace of Versailles, was commissioned to produce the illuminations, and El-Dabh created a musical sequence known as the *Egyptian Series* in the studios of the Radiodiffusion Française in Paris with an orchestra conducted by film composer Georges Delerue. Its tempting to think that, while in Paris El-Dabh might have bumped into the inventor of musique concrete, Pierre Schaeffer, who was employed at the RTF at the time but it didn t happen "I didn t have a chance," recalls El Dabh.

The *Egyptian Series* and a companion piece known as the *Islamic Series* are informed by El-Dabh's deep connections with both the ancient monuments and the people of North Africa – traditions that live and breathe and form a tangible continuity with the past. "When I did that music, it reminded me of all the energies I experienced in Egypt," he says "*Pyramid Rock To The Sky* [one of the two sections of the *Egyptian Series* played at the Pyramids today] is really feeling the energies of the regular people there Knowing Egyptians, I don't think they'd have liked to slave to build the pyramids. The way I imagine the workers of the pyramids is that they were dancing and singing, putting the stones together They were doing it with incredible satisfaction. If you produce a nice sound, a big huge ton of rock could be like a ball in your hand, you just put it in place. If you look inside a pyramid, there's no cement, all the air is evacuated

"All the time I was travelling in Egypt," he continues, "I always said the music still lives here, it never disappeared I felt it in the voices of the boatmen who took boats across the Nile, my father s business was in grain and he had boats coming into his warehouse right on the Nile. It felt like their voices contained the ancient time In the 60s I wrote a piece called *Monotone, Bitone And Polytone* for wind sextet and percussion My brother sat down and listened to that with these workers who bring the grains on their back from the warehouse, and they felt the energy of that, and just surrounded it. My brother said "If these boatmen can understand your music, my brother, you've made it!" Even my mother screamed when she listened to it – it reminded her of the blindfolded cows pulling round the water wheel, like it squeaks She thought I was creating the village sound and the sound of the whole area came to her"

Nowadays, although El-Dabh is technically in retirement, he continues to lead a full and active musical life – the week after we speak, he is due to fly back to Cairo to attend a recital of *The Quest*, his new symphonic piece, he claims he stays up late every night composing music, and wants to "go into a deep study of physics, or mathematics in which I could say, two plus two equals five instead of four. I feel I need to do that" Moving to America actually gave him a wider perspective on his homeland, he admits "One day, I was back in Cairo and being interviewed on the radio, and they said, 'What fascinates you here?' I said 'What fascinates me is the vibration when you walk down by the train station – there's a huge mass of people, I can feel the vibration and I can walk through them' And I said, 'Actually the people on the street could build another pyramid. The fact is, we are ignorant They have so much energy The most exciting thing is, they could still build a pyramid, but consciously nobody thinks about it"

This perception is a continuation of the "attraction" he felt when taking his wire recorder to the zaar ceremony 64 years ago "I felt that these people are a part of me – what they were doing is also me, I didn t feel separate So the sound they were making is part of me – it resonated into me" □ Crossing Into The Electric Magnetic *will be reissued on Reel Recordings this spring*. The Musical World Of Halim El-Dabh *by Denise A Seachrist is published by Kent State University Press Thanks to David Bedeguani and Mike Hovancsek www.halimeldabh.com*

Grindstone cowboys

Throwing a curveball after 13 albums with The Bad Seeds, Nick Cave has revitalised his ravaged confessional music by forming Grinderman — a very different beast that draws its bone-crunching rock power from improvisation, spooky violin loops and the spirit of ecstatic jazz. Words: Keith Moliné. Photography: Tara Darby

It may be a consequence of years of close musical collaboration: it may be a reflection of how their new project is cast very much as a collective venture, but the members of Grinderman are actually starting to look like one another. There are the clothes – ruffled bohemian chic, elegantly and immaculately distressed. There are the tousled Byronic manes. And most of all, there's the facial hair. If anyone can reclaim Zapata moustaches and shovel beards as viable male grooming options, it's Grinderman.

Nick Cave, Warren Ellis, Martyn Casey and Jim Sclavunos have been playing together in Cave's group The Bad Seeds for a decade now (in fact, Casey's been at it for a decade and a half), and even though the same quartet line-up has toured as a pared down 'solo' ensemble, this present undertaking sounds like something new. Of course their album debut this month contains all the usual hallmarks of Cave's work – ravaged blues, spooked atmospheres, dark confessionals perched somewhere on the cusp between the sardonic and the righteous – but *Grinderman* is clearly not a Bad Seeds record, it's the first album by Grinderman. It's also very good. There are breakneck screamers like "Depth Charge Ethel" and "Honey Bee Let's Fly To Mars", which sound more abandoned than anything since 1994's "Thirsty Dog" (from *Let Love In*). But there are also several hypnotic mood pieces such as "Electric Alice" and "When My Love Comes Down" that chart new musical territory for Cave.

"It's the first record I've made that I actually find myself playing," he beams. "Sitting in the office, whacking it on in the morning and cranking it up and enjoying it, and I never do that with The Bad Seeds. Not that I think it's a better record, it's just that there's too much of me in The Bad Seeds, and there's some other stuff going on in Grinderman. It comes out of a different place."

It would be stretching a point to say that Grinderman represents the first time Cave has allowed others a role in influencing the direction of a project. He is such a commanding vocal presence on 80s and early 90s albums like *Your Funeral... My Trial* (1986) and *Henry's Dream* (1992) that it's easy to underestimate how vital the contribution of the other musicians was to the songwriting process. And of course that's also the case with his early work in The Birthday Party in the late 70s/early 80s, where Tracy Pew's prowling porno bass and the scything cartoon violence of Rowland S Howard's guitar were as crucial in carrying the narrative as Cave's rabid lyrical exhortations and chainsaw shrieks. Nevertheless, the Nick Cave we have got used to is the crooning balladeer of his work post-*Boatman's Call* (1997). As he honed these more traditional skills ("*Q* magazine Classic Songwriter Award 2005," he winces), the opportunities for the prodigiously gifted group to cut loose were necessarily limited. As violinist Warren Ellis remembers: "When I joined The Bad Seeds it was very much an established group. I walked into a very unfamiliar situation, that of trying to find a place when there wasn't much space. It was an enormous learning curve, discovering what you didn't play was what mattered."

2003's *Nocturama* and 2004's *Abattoir Blues/The Lyre Of Orpheus*, however, showed signs that Cave was seeking some way of re-accommodating the collective, spontaneous element of group collaboration into his working methods. Indeed, it was in the writing sessions for the latter, in which

Grinderman in London, December 2008. Left to right: Warren Ellis, Jim Sclavunos, Nick Cave, Martyn Casey

the group were slimmed down to a quartet so that they could work as efficiently as possible that Grinderman was born. It was just that nobody knew it yet. "We played for five days in this little studio in Paris," explains Cave. "As a band we went on some of the most unbelievably terrible, hugely pompous musical excursions. Stuff that was just really bad. We really enjoyed it."

"With the four-piece we could come up with ideas pretty quickly without talking about it or thinking about it," says long-serving bassist Casey. Drummer Sclavunos agrees that being freed from theoretical responsibility to 'the song' was hugely positive. "You're allowed to try something that would ordinarily be absolutely embarrassing or indulgent. Because you're leaving the critical evaluation for later, you can do stuff that might be horrifying in another context. But with this it was between us four guys. We were free to fail."

"And out of some of that music there were tiny little bits that were really good," continues Cave. "When we had 50 hours of music to listen to, some of it was really ugly stuff – but some of it wasn't."

The sessions for *Grinderman* followed a similar pattern (and also involved the important contribution of producer Nick Launay in the same small Paris studio). Five days of improvising, a period of evaluation and structuring of the material into loose songs, followed by a week of recording. But the new album pushes the process significantly further. You have to go as far back as 1988's *Tender Prey* to find a Cave album where sound and texture is so foregrounded and the well-made songwriting manoeuvres that he's become famous for so underplayed. Ellis feels that this could be explained by the various extracurricular work that the musicians have undertaken in recent years. "It made us aware we had a lot of ideas that could find a home outside of the usual places. Nick and I had written music for two theatrical productions by Icelandic director Gísli Örn Gardarsson, *Woyzeck* and *Metamorphosis*. We had also done the soundtrack for *The Proposition* (2005's Australian revenge Western, which Cave scripted). All involving a wide variety of musical styles," Casey elaborates. "Purely through playing together doing different things, realising that we could do almost any kind of music, we thought it would be worth trying to capture something on record without a concept before we went into the studio."

Through improvisation, Grinderman found the freedom to explore musical ideas that they would normally view as incidental to the process of composition. The usual hierarchy of priorities was turned upside down, leading to a number of significant differences between the sessions and their previous work as a quartet. There was Ellis's extensive deployment of heavily processed sample loops of his violin, which became central to the majority of the songs. And there was Cave's decision to abandon the piano in favour of the electric guitar, an instrument with which he only had a passing familiarity. "It was great seeing Nick armed with his years of experience writing songs and a few months' worth of guitar skills," Ellis says. "Fantastic. Originally he said he would do the demos and then we'd get a guitarist, but I said I wouldn't be in the band if he did that. I thought that defeated the purpose." Casey is similarly enthusiastic about Cave's guitar work. "He's like a lot of those blues guys like Muddy Waters who punctuate their lyrics with a bit of guitar. It's not rhythm, it's not lead, it's something else." Cave's playing is something else indeed, ranging from the brilliantly obstinate three-note motif of "Go Tell The Women" to the extraordinary, untamed solo on the album's title track, which he describes as "glorious abuse". On reflection, the guitar is the perfect instrument for Cave to exorcise some of the demons that he used to banish with an endless barrage of profanity and vocal hysterics. "It's an enormously forgiving instrument," he agrees. "I'd just bought it a month before. I'd never really plugged it in. You can't do that with a piano. If you hit a wrong note on a piano you hear it a mile away." Ironically, the "Grinderman" solo recalls the kind of rough magic that original Bad Seeds guitarist Blixa Bargeld was allowed to conjure in the early days of the group, before Cave's songs began to demand more discreet colours and the Einsturzende Neubauten wildman's instrumental role became more and more marginalised – disappointingly so, in the opinion of some.

In addition to its expressionist potential, the guitar is important to the new material in other ways too. "For better or for worse, the thing about me playing the guitar is that I don't have as much control over the direction of the song," Cave explains. "When I'm composing or playing the piano, even if I'm composing with other members, I'm dictating the terms of the song by what chords I'm going to. And I've been playing the piano and writing on the piano for so long that my hands just know where the next chord's going to sound good. Your playing becomes a bit predictable, and a consequence of that is that you sing in the same way. If you play the guitar you can put it where you like, and you can stop playing and things empty out. There's room to move around vocally, and not battle with the guitar, because – and this is not by any means talking down the approaches of any of the guitarists that I've worked with – I've always found it difficult. In The Birthday Party it was ridiculous. Me and Rowland were literally at war with one another as to who could take up the most space, even who'd be the one to end the song."

Using loops as the basis for much of the album's material was similarly liberating, both as an aid to composition and as instrumental voices in their own right. Ellis has been using them in his work with his own group Dirty Three for most of the last decade, and they were important for the development of the soundtrack to *The Proposition*, but they've never been so prominent as structural elements in Cave songwriting. "They're great to sing to, great to compose to, because they set up an instant atmosphere where what you're writing seems valid," explains Cave. "They don't inform anything musically, they're not taking you anywhere musically. I often stick one on when I'm alone in the office and just write away." They are also central to the fabric of the final performance. With Ellis controlling them and applying effects live, they lose all the rigidity normally associated with sampled material and behave like live instruments. The title track, for example, features a lugubrious strummed loop and almost nothing else but Cave's vocal – and the space available allows the singer to deliver one of the most perfectly measured performances he's ever recorded. And though many drummers are loath to work with loops, Sclavunos isn't one of them. "One thing about loops is that sometimes the point where they cut doesn't quite fall in with the measure very easily," he explains. "And that's the fun of them, they force you to treat rhythm in an unfamiliar way – do I go with it or do I fight it? Sometimes you do both. No drummer is as metronomic as their press releases might lead the world to believe."

On a number of tracks, Ellis's loops provide lush, swirling settings that recall the dream mantras of Alice Coltrane. Indeed, one of the album's most stunning pieces, "Electric Alice", is a conscious homage to the (sadly recently deceased) harpist/pianist. I suggest that the influence of ecstatic electric jazz is not one that many would assume to be of central significance to Cave and his group, but the singer disagrees. "There's an immediacy to her stuff, the way things are distilled into quite short pieces of music," he enthuses. "You know they're virtually pop songs. Warren turned me on to her years ago. Larry Young too. We were doing *Nocturama* and it was plodding along in this gentle way, and then someone managed to download *Lawrence Of Newark* (the organist's 1973 masterpiece) and cranked that up in the studio, and it was like, fucking hell. You know, "Khalid Of Space". That's extraordinary, that piece of music. Just after that we recorded "Dead Men In My Bed". It basically changed that record. "Depth Charge Ethel" is an attempt at that organ sound. It can just come in like a fucking freight train. We had a long piece that was sort of trembling on the edge of being used for Grinderman but it sounded so much like "Khalid Of Space" we just couldn't use it."

Grinderman's focus on instrumental detail makes for one of Cave's most immediately gratifying and sonically adventurous albums since his still-astonishing debut *From Her To Eternity* (1984). There's the discipline and restraint that has become second nature to them through the necessary restrictions of playing in a large ensemble like The Bad Seeds, but there's a clear sense that there is more room for the musicians to manoeuvre. "There are much

longer instrumental passages in Grinderman," says Sclavunos. "Something like "Electric Alice" has very extended instrumental sections, and they're the primary focus of the song. The vocals are almost interludes that lead up to those bits of musical interplay between the sleigh bells (the only overdub on the otherwise totally improvised piece) and the distorted organ, with the loops swirling through it. There's less emphasis on it being lyric driven." Cave agrees that his words do not take centre stage on the new release. "I feel quite removed from the album in a strange kind of way," he reveals. "The thing with Grinderman that I found took an enormous weight off was that I was allowed to retreat a little bit with the concerns I'm writing about in The Bad Seeds. The lyrics are very much a secondary thing in a lot of these songs. You don't have to crane your ear to the speaker and listen to the narrative. And from my point of view I can't listen to that stuff. It's just like standing in front of the mirror for hours and looking at yourself. It's difficult to do."

Cave's approach to the lyrics on the new album was to go with his initial instincts as much as possible. Much of what constitutes a song's final lyric remains unchanged from the ad-libbed vocal of the initial session. Such is Cave's skill. In this area that it's impossible in most cases to tell which lyrics are improvised and which have been worked at over a period of time – or perhaps that's testimony to his ability to write so transparently. "It's often the case when I'm writing lyrics in the office that there are ones that I'm really proud of, but when I take them into a band situation and start to sing them they just don't work," he says. "Particularly the ones that you spend a lot of time over, they often sadly don't see the light of day, because they're too refined and too selfconscious. It ends up all about how you sing something, and some of these lines just can't be sung. And then you listen to John Lee Hooker, for example, who for many years has informed pretty much everything I've done, and the psychological depth that he goes to, singing very simple lyrics, is just extraordinary. It's all in his phrasing and the sound of his voice, and the way he places the words."

It's that kind of immediacy that Cave is aiming at with Grinderman. Ellis noticed how playing guitar affected the way the singer approached the vocal. "It made him phrase differently lyrically, very differently to when he presents a bunch of songs to The Bad Seeds written on the piano, and we try to arrange them. It's extraordinary witnessing Nick improvise lyrically over an idea. A musical idea would start off and he would launch into something, sometimes for our amusement I'm sure. There is a certain amount of entertaining going on." Cave's off-the-cuff approach does indeed provide moments of broad knockabout comedy. In addition to the more familiar dry wit. "No Pussy Blues", for example, though at first seeming to deliver little more than what it says on the tin, does so with undeniable panache as Cave inhabits the persona of the scheming lothario frustrated by his failed attempts at sexual conquest: *"I sent her every type of flower/I played her guitar by the hour/I patted her revolting little chihuahua/But still she just didn't want to."* By the end the protagonist is thoroughly chassed off by this state of affairs: *"I thought I'd try another tack/I drank a litre of cognac/I threw her down upon her back/But she just laughed and said that she just didn't want to."* Coming from a writer who has so often in the past conflated desire, violence and death in his work, this and other similar themed songs on the album (like "Love Bomb", with Cave hilariously bemoaning the lack of tips on seduction to be found on the middle class, middle England daytime radio shows *Woman's Hour* and *Gardener's Question Time*) start to come across as something darker than the farcical romps they initially seem to be, while never quite scaling the heights – or is that plumbing the depths? – of genuinely disturbing classics like the notorious "Herd On For Love" from *Your Funeral... My Trial*. Does Cave worry that his audience might automatically assume that his narrative voice is a reflection of his real self? "I feel very much attached to all of the voices on all of my records," Cave asserts. "My own personal life is a lot more guarded than the lives those characters lead, but I couldn't write about that stuff if there wasn't a part of me in there in some way. The problem with questions like that is that they stop you writing those sorts of songs in the future. I did an interview with a female interviewer who found aspects of the [Grinderman] song "Go Tell The Women" offensive, and asked me to explain myself. At the end of the day you've got to be free to write whatever you like, that's what's wonderful about the whole thing. A lot of the time you're just entertained by a rhyme or something like that and the consequences of the lyrics don't even come into your mind until later on."

Nevertheless, there is a thematic unity, even a narrative flow, to *Grinderman* that belies the loose spontaneity of the methodology employed in its creation. "There seems to be a common theme of alienation and disconnectedness, general disconnectedness from things," says Cave. "Most of the songs are dealing with this in one form or another. About impotency and the inability to have any direct effect over anything. That would seem to be an overarching theme to the whole thing. So rather than a narrative, the songs are kind of riffs on a theme. I mean, that's often the case with records I do anyway. I guess the word 'narrative' suggests a story, but obviously it's not, but a lot of thought was put into the ordering of the songs, and one song definitely leads on to the next and echoes the one before." This underlying structure is important to the way the album works, without wanting to get all *Lamb Lies Down On Broadway* about it. "Which I think we all owned," smiles Cave, adding wickedly, "the drumming's really good on it."

I ask the group if there's a danger that Grinderman will be seen as a mere diversion, a holiday from the 'serious' work of The Bad Seeds? "What's wrong with that?" counters Sclavunos. "I think people approach some of these things with such a humourless attitude. They never seem to appreciate the humour in Nick's lyrics." Ellis is similarly bullish. "I actually don't care what people think. When we were preparing for it we asked a lot of hows and what-abouts, but never any whys. That would seem to be implicit in the recording. This was approached with the same intent as any other recording I have been involved with."

Unsurprisingly, the album is already being talked of (even in the pre-release promotional material) as some kind of return to the days of The Birthday Party, with a soupçon of No Wave thrown in courtesy of Sclavunos's background as a member of Lydia Lunch's late 70s NYC degenerates Teenage Jesus And The Jerks. "That's not really an accurate description of the music on offer, though as plugs go it's a pretty tantalising one. Sclavunos is philosophical on the matter. "It's a good hook, but it's sticking in our gills a bit," he says. "Grinderman is not an attempt to reclaim our lost youth. I mean, Teenage Jesus was anti-music, whereas Grinderman is very much inspired by rock 'n' roll and the blues. We don't have any issues with it. We like it. We do it." Cave rightly points out that *Grinderman's* instinctive simplicity has little to do with the action-splatter frenzy of his old outfit, which was seemingly random but actually tightly arranged for maximum impact. "I don't even really remember what The Birthday Party did. But for one, a lot of it was pretty complicated. If *Grinderman* is like anything from the early work, it's *From Her To Eternity*, in that we went into the studio without any fucking idea even what kind of band we wanted to be, or what sort of music we wanted to play and just had to find that out. It was four people who got on in some way as personalities, and we had to find a way to work that as musicians. Grinderman was pretty much the same thing."

The group is about to make its 'debut' appearance at the Dirty Three-curated All Tomorrow's Parties in April, and there's talk of a tour that might take in either small clubs or festival stages. Recreating the heavily improvised songs of the album is something of a technical headache, for Ellis in particular, and one can forgive Cave for being slightly nervous about displaying his nascent guitar skills in front of thousands of onlookers. I ask him if he's likely to be playing guitar with The Bad Seeds from now on. "There's certainly a perverse part of me that's looking forward to going into the next Bad Seeds record and saying 'The songs go like this', and playing them on the guitar," he chuckles. "I'd anticipate some awkward shuffling from certain members of the group." ☐ Grinderman *is out this month on Mute. The group play All Tomorrow's Parties at Minehead Butlin's in April. see Out There*

Far from slowing down his prodigious output, a recent near-death experience has added extra grist to the mill of Peter Hammill. Since 1969, his songs have always unflinchingly addressed the Seven Ages of Man, both with his Progressive group Van Der Graaf Generator and on his restless solo output, in an attempt to capture the "shimmering electricity of life". Words: Mike Barnes. Photography: Eva Vermandel

Peter Hammill in Bradford on Avon, December 2008

Life sentences

"I didn't have white tunnels, but I did have the feeling that if I got too tired, which at a certain point might have been an option, then I would just drop and it would have been into a black hole," says Peter Hammill, recalling his near death experience following a heart attack in 2003. "And it remains with me that would be a reasonable description of what it felt like. Not particularly dramatic, not particularly fearful, just quiet and scary. I have to say that this is far from a unique experience," he continues. "It is actually, in a way, an incredibly mundane experience. Not everyone has a heart attack but everyone has something or other, so I'm not remotely special. Just because I write songs doesn't make it a better or worse near-death experience."

If many people have undergone a similar experience, few go on to compose a song about it, and it's difficult to think of anyone else but Hammill writing something as haunting as "Event Horizon", from his most recent album, *Singularity*. He has always had a penchant for grappling with weighty subjects – the stuff of life – and turning them into song, something he has done on more than 40 studio and live albums, both solo and with his group Van Der Graaf Generator.

Hammill's signature vocal style can be heard emerging during his first tentative steps into the music business in the late 60s as an "over-serious young man in his early twenties", and it runs throughout the work of the "approaching 60 year old, post-cardiac man" of 2007.

"I deliberately didn't try to go towards writing about this stuff immediately afterwards," Hammill says of "Event Horizon", "because inevitably it would have been naff and so I wanted to get some distance on it, and see what I remembered of it as a human experience. That's part of the unwritten contract between me and the audience – everyone knows these things happen, and maybe I can shed a little bit of light on them by just going around the corner and looking at them from there. Because that's what songs do. So I certainly couldn't just do a 'The show must go on!' bit, you know, cast aside the tubes and bandages," he says, waving his arms in a theatrical flourish. "I know that's the Judy Garland route, but that wasn't ever really an option for me."

From the outset, Hammill's characterful mid-range and a gorgeous falsetto voice marked him out from the pack. In the 70s he acquired a harsher timbre and a more declamatory style punctuated with octave leaps. This actually developed from a pragmatic solution to problems he was experiencing onstage with Van Der Graaf Generator. "As an instrument the voice needed to be competing with the horns and the organ, and also the 'massive power' of PAs as known at that time," he explains. "So I had to develop some kind of welly in the voice in order to get it across."

Nowadays, any enthusiasm for anything from the 1970s Progressive rock era is ordinarily followed by a disclaimer, emphatically separating the object of praise from, for example, Emerson Lake & Palmer's reading of Mussorgsky's *Pictures At An Exhibition*, or, worse still, Rick Wakeman's *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table*. Van Der Graaf Generator, however, appeared to be categorised as Prog principally because there was nowhere else to put them. Formed in 1969, they almost immediately ran into severe contractual difficulties with their first record label, Mercury. But Charisma Records founder Tony Stratton-Smith sorted out their problems and signed them to his label, where they went on to become one of its flagship groups. Their characteristically elongated songs – almost all of them written by Hammill – had a finely wrought architectural span, but grandstanding solos were strictly verboten.

"I think that historical perspective has collapsed everything down into a 'Prog era'," Hammill says, "but what is often forgotten is there was an extraordinary period of ten to 15 years from 1964, where something different was happening every year. And by 1969, which was when we started, there was 'underground': Pink Floyd, Soft Machine, Crazy World Of Arthur Brown, King Crimson, a few other people. Then out of that, within a year or so, came Prog. And because we started at that underground point, I think we were always a little outside that. Quite happy, I have to say, to be rolled into Prog, because it meant covers of magazines and all that sort of thing, but I think there was this element of aggression, of chaos, that was there [in our music], but wasn't there generally in what came to be known as Prog rock. The further away one gets – for 15 or 20 years – we were desperately trying to shrug the thing off because of the associations, all that wheedly stuff, all the millions of keyboards, all the stuff that we didn't want to be bound by."

There was an unusual mix. Drummer Guy Evans had briefly played with American psychedelic outfit The Misunderstood when they moved over to the UK, and, like saxophonist David Jackson, he had been turned around by the ecstatic free jazz of Coltrane albums like *Ascension*. Hugh Banton, meanwhile, had trained as an organist at Wakefield Cathedral, and then there was Hammill's predilection for blues and soul. Indeed, beneath their very un-soul context, Van Der Graaf Generator's music reveals itself as full of soul and R&B riffs and motifs.

"Yes, absolutely, straight R&B," Hammill concurs. "Equally there are lots of guitar riffs that are clearly originating from the Howlin' Wolf – John Lee Hooker, particularly – angle. Because John Lee started writing riffs that were definitely not 12 bars and quite often the riff would not stick at being the same thing, which has always been a fascination of mine. So yeah, as far as I'm concerned it's sometimes almost too bleedin' obvious."

Even so, it's harder to think of anything further from the ecstatic tension and release of soul music than the draining catharsis of Van Der Graaf Generator's notorious fourth album, 1971's *Pawn Hearts*: where all the peculiarly English bonhomie between musician and audience of the time, which had run from the tea-drinking whimsy of Home Counties psychedelia through The Kinks's affectionate satires of the everyman, had curdled horribly into its nightmarish inverse.

Pawn Hearts is dark, grotesque and quite preposterous at times, but it taps deep into a powerful energy source, uniting the audience and the group in the search for hitherto unobtainable rock thrills. There are hymnal interludes within which Hammill seeks refuge; elsewhere, ugly riffs and chaotic eruptions spur him onto his most exaggerated vocal leaps. Banton's ecclesiastical organ lines – with the instruments modified by himself and fed through customised effects boxes – recall Messiaen's bone-crunching dischords more than Bach's music of the spheres. He also plays bass pedals to cover for departed bassist Nic Potter. Jackson's electric sax, meanwhile, is harsh and garish. Amazingly, *Pawn Hearts* topped the charts in Italy, but Charisma deemed the group unviable and pulled their tour support, causing them to split.

The original plan was to make *Pawn Hearts* a double LP, with some live in-the-studio rollercoaster rides through songs soon to be dropped from their live set. Also, to divert the spotlight from Hammill, the group each contributed solo pieces, which have since surfaced as extra tracks on the recently remastered and reissued version. It's intriguing to speculate what their original audience would have made of Jackson's mix of echoed sax, breaking glass and freeform playing on "Angle Of Incidents", or Banton's "Diminutions", with its sheets of atonal, abstract sound.

"Of course, there had always been this element that went towards the Ligeti/Stockhausen end of things," Hammill explains. "But up to that point, generally, they would be buried sonic elements as opposed to being right up front, betraying their progeny. So you had this strange soul band with a bit of Ligeti going on in the background. Some people get the feeling that there's something very clever going on, that you're meant to study and understand in order to get any appreciation out of it, which from my point of view is absolutely not it. The stuff is done because it makes sense and often in a visceral sense rather than an intellectual one. But that is what we call 'fun'. It's an absolutely essential part of the entire thing: has to make sense, has to be fun."

At this point Hammill's solo output was running parallel to Van Der Graaf Generator's. But although the group feature on his debut, *Fool's Mate*, released before *Pawn Hearts* in 1971, its menu of groovy pop tunes cut with contemplative acoustic songs exemplified his desire that his solo and group paths should generally avoid confluence. Hammill had already experienced how easy it was to fall foul of the music business, so to assert his independence he purchased a TEAC four-track recorder to enable him to record at home in what he recognises was part defensive strategy, part creative effort.

"I didn't know any other people doing what I was doing at the time," he says. "But being a self opinionated young man I would have probably ignored them in any case. Recording technology was so expensive then and, equally, I think you needed to have some experience of studios in order to do it at all, because there were no schools of recording engineering, there was no *Sound On Sound* [magazine], where people could find out about recording."

Hammill's solo material, although predominantly song based, soon expanded to include peculiar sonic elements. "A lot of it came out of mistakes or taking one bit and sticking it somewhere else," he clarifies. "With the pressures of time and money in

Van Der Graaf Generator (Hammill second left) in Paris, 1974

Van Der Graaf live, early 1972

Below and bottom: Solo Hammill, late 1970s

a commercial studio it would absolutely not have appeared at all. The entire process throughout the years has been fundamentally derived from the fact of having my own studios."

I mention "Modern" from his 1974 album *The Silent Corner And The Empty Stage*. Here, this homemade approach yielded verse sections of glistening acoustic figures and massive fuzz guitar lines. The song proceeds through watercolour keyboard washes and an ominous middle section of bass guitars and oscillators before reaching its resolution. "Well, one of the odd things about the last year has been going back and remastering all of those solo albums" Hammill says. "So a lot of this stuff I haven't listened to for years and years, and as you say, 'Modern' is an interesting case in point – hugely deficient in some aspects sonically, hugely interesting in others. In fact, the interest exactly counterbalances the deficiency, but that's where things get interesting. And the oddity is, of course, that as technology has moved so fast and my musicianly skills have increased, I have no idea how I managed to do that stuff on four-track. There were loads of things, particularly from that early era, when I was made to be 'out there' in terms of experimentation, to make something that was aggressive and big with just my then minimal skills and with minimal equipment."

It's difficult to convey to anyone born too late the full effect of punk's shock of the new in 1977. When Johnny Rotten guested on Tommy Vance's Capital Radio show to play some of his favourite records, it felt like a culturally significant moment. He proved himself a young man of taste and discernment, playing cuts by Can, Captain Beefheart, Dr Allmantado and two tracks from Hammill's 1975 solo album, *Nadir's Big Chance*, even going so far as to say that Hammill was "a true original. I love all his stuff", and that David Bowie had "copied" him. Another admirer, Mark E Smith of The Fall, even suggested they record together. "I last saw Mark in the Netherlands some years ago, at the Crossing Borders festival," recalls Hammill. "Several beers were consumed over a couple of days but not a lot of sense was made. None of this is to say that anything binding could ever have come out of any collaboration. I think we acknowledge each other as different sides of the same coin – resistant to orthodoxy, I suppose. We're in touch in principle, which, frankly, is about as good as it gets for either of us."

Punk might have booted over the statues of Prog, but Hammill's was left standing, even if it was metaphorically gobbed on now and again. *Nadir's Big Chance* was recorded in late 1974 with Van Der Graaf Generator members, just before they were set to reform, but Hammill was keen that this solo album should, again, be quite different from what the group were about to record. It was, according to Hammill's tongue-in-cheek sleevenotes, supposedly written by his 16 year old alter-ego, Rikki Nadir, "and comprised "beefy punk songs, ballads and soul struts", which were played with a brash, brassy immediacy that at times recalled early Roxy Music. The concept might sound a little arch, but it was, in Hammill's opinion, "both fun and serious".

Hammill has been consistent in his denial of directly influencing punk, even going so far as to say that the album – whose title track finds him sneering at the fag ends of glam still smouldering around him – wasn't even prescient of a sea change in rock. "I kind of still go with that – that it didn't go from *Nadir* to punk," he says. "But I'd say there was a parallel, because it was three chords on a loud electric guitar with a basic pulse and go *'Arrgh!'* But the punk movement got it from the same things I originally got it from, which was The Who, The Animals, R&B and so on. But the interesting thing is that *Nadir* got absolutely slagged when it came out, because, supposedly, it revealed that my creativity had run out and it spelt doom not only for me, but also for the upcoming Van Der Graaf Generator Mark II."

If it didn't directly influence punk, it definitely influenced the Van Der Graaf Generator of the mid-70s: the reformed group played in a more condensed and concentrated way on *Godbluff* (1975) and *Still Life* (1976). *Still Life*'s title track comes over as an unholy hybrid of HP Lovecraft's short story *The Survivor* and Joris Karl Huysmans's novel *Against Nature*, depicting a world of decadent meaninglessness, where death is forever kept at bay. At the song's denouement – surely the absolute antithesis of rock's narcissistic phallocentricity – Hammill looks on numbly before climbing into bed to pleasure his withered, centuries-old wife. Then there is "Childlike Faith In Childhood's End", based on the Arthur C Clarke novel. Describing the metamorphosis of the human race, it concludes with Hammill searching for a sign of the hereafter and railing at the entire cosmos. This is the sort of ambition that got him labelled as pretentious. But at least he was reaching for something.

"And at times not quite getting there," he cuts in. "But that would be better than repeating myself. Pretension is in the eye of the beholder. For what it's worth, I think I wrote some lyrics that made a degree of sense at a time when there were an awful lot of nonsensical lyrics going around."

Prompted by personnel changes, the group pruned their name back to Van Der Graaf before disbanding once again through lack of money in 1978. Their final studio album, *The Quiet Zone/ The Pleasure Dome*, had promised a degree of commercial success with its shorter, pithier songs but their monolithic headstone was a monstrous live album, *Vital*. With Hammill playing more electric guitar, fans were left an epitaph of raw, pulverisingly heavy versions of old favourites and brutal, pared down new material.

Hammill's solo output has always incorporated occasional forays into complete abstraction. His early 80s tape pieces, later collected as *Loops And Reels* (1983), signalled the furthest point he had reached in this line of enquiry. But it was on *The Future Now* (1978) that he first began to experiment with noise and timbre within song structures, deploying multiple drum machines, electronics and massed harmonies, while on *A Black Box* (1980) he added thunderous, primitive drums to the album's 20 minute "Flight". With Evans, Potter and guitarist John Ellis, he formed The K Group, whose 1985 live album, *The Margin*, was at times as raw and aggressive as *Vital*. But into the 90s, Hammill's albums became more contemplative, starting with *Fireships* (1991), which launched the BaCalm series on his new Fie! label.

Like much of his later output, it slipped below the radar. Yet there are those who believe Hammill might have achieved some Bowie-like success, had he toned his music down a bit. "I know it sounds a bonkers thing to say, because I wouldn't be a musician and a singer if I didn't have ego – and it's not that I don't want to be successful – but I didn't have and don't have that drive to be a star," asserts Hammill. "To be honest this option was never on the table, so it's certainly not something I regret. Love doing the music, love being onstage and want to sell in enormous quantities – and believe that it should – but I just don't have that aspect.

"I wouldn't have been able to do it if I'd been more successful in money terms or numbers terms, or even in critical terms. If I'd had more success it would have been harder for me to remain as driven and remain as interested. There is this thing with artists, generally, that when success comes and just before the creative juices stop completely, he or she is not really engaged in the work. And I have to remain engaged, because it's vocational."

If Hammill's desire to push his voice to its limits makes it a unique instrument, it can also be somewhat daunting, especially live. On the original 1973 recording of "Easy To Slip Away" (on *Chameleon In The Shadow Of The Night*), his voice has a bruised sweetness, in keeping with the song's heartfelt address to close friends who've drifted apart. A live solo version from Italy in 1978 – included on the remastered album – is shockingly different in tone. Underpinned by crashing piano chords, its outpouring of raw emotion peaks at a scream, as if the singer is about to tear the song to shreds and, with it, the painful memories it contains. The version on *Veracity*, a 2006 live album with violinist Stuart Gordon, is equally powerful, less extreme but more concentrated and stoic, informed by experience. "For what it's worth," says Hammill, "I do think I'm a pretty good and reasonably serious singer, and part of that job is getting lost in things and investing each sung note with appropriate intensity. Yes, thankfully, I do get lost in it – in exactly the same way that an actor gets lost in the part."

Hammill's way of barking out some of his more obvious lyrics can leave listeners feeling browbeaten, I suggest. "I think that is totally fair," he replies unabashed. "And it's particularly in the area of 'social' stuff. Must try harder... But actually, it's very hard to write non-hectoring songs about things like that. "Like Veronica" is in that territory. Is domestic violence a bad thing? Yes it is a bad thing. I think that's one [that works] by virtue of stepping slightly outside. Because this is the trick. It becomes hectoring if it's just stating the obvious, or the obvious from a certain given mindset. I do accept the criticism, but I don't really have a handle on things until some time after I've finished them. When they're immediately finished I can't look at them and get any distance from them. It's like a snowblindness."

Songwriters habitually view the events of their lives as raw material. But few chronicle the Seven Ages of

IAN DICKSON/REPERS (PARTS); ARMANDO GALLO (SOLO)

Man as assiduously as Hammill. "Afterwards" (from Van Der Graaf Generator's *Aerosol Grey Machine*, 1969) is a song of youth, specifically capturing the point at which post-coital bliss slides into unease. "Wilhelmina" (from *The Silent Corner And The Empty Stage*, 1974), is a letter to a baby girl, cautioning her as to what life is likely to throw her way. "Sometimes they were written without the requisite life experience," Hammill, himself a parent, notes. "Betrayed" (from *Over*, 1977) is a painful, almost too personal howl of nihilistic anger at longterm relationship breakdown. As the years have passed, ageing and expediency within relationships have been dealt with in "His Best Girl" (from *Fireships*, 1991), while "Since The Kids" (from *This*, 1998) is a vivid snapshot of parents' confusion when the nest is flown.

Asking questions of himself and the audience in the starkest terms, *Singularity* is one of Hammill's strongest albums. It's also surprisingly accessible given its prevailing theme of mortality. Indeed, it opens with a pop song, "Our Eyes Give It Shape", where Hammill sings "*I'm so glad I'm still here to see it*" with the joy of a man who has been given a reprieve. A feeling of vulnerability runs through the album. "Friday Afternoon" is about Hammill's piano tuner, who was killed by a drink driver; "Meanwhile My Mother" is an achingly tender song about his mother, who died in a state of senility. "*Meanwhile my mother/Lost in a world of her own/ Turns to look out of the window/Down to the verdant earth below/Some journeys we make alone*." Few other writers address such topics in song.

"It continues to be a kind of... I was about to say making sense of things, but that would be too much," muses Hammill. "By now I certainly don't believe I'm going to make sense of things by being a song and dance man, or by any individual song doing it, but just to get some kind of narrative, both musical and textual, which from a certain light at a certain time of day makes sense to me.

"I think there is something I do in this territory, which is not the norm with songwriters," he continues. "There's normally something quite dramatic going on in pop songs, and in quite a lot of my songs there's very, very little going on. But I quite like that aspect of a song, because theres this kind of shimmering electricity of life about it. There's a lot of non dramatic stuff happening. "Event Horizon" is absolutely the pinnacle of that because your singer is actually just lying flat on his back with tubes."

Sonically, *Singularity* is an exploratory mix of 'straight' instruments and programming with fuzz guitars and passages of manipulated noise. The quality of his vocals, enhanced by extraordinary spectral harmonies, is especially striking. "It's a different voice now," he avers. "Physically it cannot be the same over 35 years, but it's still a thing of interest to find different areas, technically, of singing in my own self-educated way."

After a few tentative, low key reunions since 1978 Van Der Graaf Generator got back together in 2005, to record *Present* – a patchily brilliant album of songs and improvisations – and play some concerts. "It's still a reunion deal rather than a complete reformation" Hammill emphasises. "We are not a full time unit, because that definitely would be the path to absolute disaster, I'm sure. It was terrifying at first, absolutely terrifying. Also, there were certain things that we found out while we were rehearsing, like, 'Oh, that's why it never worked out in the past – because you were playing that and I was playing this.' But to be honest, we were all surprised by how good it sounded from the moment we started to rehearse. One of the aspects of doing things for a period of time is that although you don't have quite so much flaring comet youthful energy, the ageing actor knows exactly how to time things. But we did come at it with the correct intensity. It was very interesting and a fantastic experience, and now – onwards."

Following the departure of saxophonist Jackson, the group are now down to a trio. "I don't exactly know what they are going to be like" muses Hammill about the slimmed down group's forthcoming concerts. "That's rather exciting, really. I suspect we might be doing more improvisation than before. It will be quite experimental, I think."

By way of displaying the "correct intensity" at the Royal Festival Hall concert in May 2005, Hammill got so fired up and lost in the part that you have to ask whether all this is wise, given his recent health problems. I apologise in advance if this question seems flippant or crass.

"No. I encourage flippancy in this regard," he smiles. "To be honest, a solo show is more punishing than a Van Der Graaf show and I was concerned about the first couple of solo shows I did when I was coming back. There are certain bits in Van Der Graaf where the singing is very strenuous, but there are others to rely upon. With a trio it might be more strenuous for all of us, our antennae are going to have to be fully out, but that's the interesting and exciting and unknown thing."

After a few hours in Hammill's company, you're not surprised to hear him describe himself as "driven". There's something restless about his manner and movements as if, even when relaxed and joking, a current is always flowing through his stick thin frame. Uniquely for an artist from his era, his prolific output is constantly forward-looking and it sustains a consistently high standard. But largely working on his own for such a long time, doesn't he find it difficult to motivate himself to add yet another album to the Hammill canon?

"No, not at all really," he counters. "My wife says that I'm an incredible loner and obsessed by work. Both of those are true, but it's interesting stuff so it doesn't feel isolating while doing it. You've got a great friend if you're working with music and I think the only time it's hard to motivate is at the very start of any individual project, where they may be an element of fear or reluctance, simply in not wanting to repeat stuff that's been done before. But once something gets going, it's like wanting to finish the crossword, it's like wanting to finish the novel, it's wanting to find out what happens and get it to the point at which it's naturally right. After 35 years, I can still find something that's different to do, musically. Now if that's not something that's going to draw me and drive me, and fascinate me, I don't know what is." ☐ *Singularity and a live recording of Van Der Graaf Generator's 2005 Reunion Concert are both released this month on Fiel. Hammill's eight 1970s solo albums have been recently reissued on EMI*

Playlists from the outer limits

Ecstatic Peace 15

Orphan Fairytale
Big Bear (Pink)
I Feel Tranter
Once I Had An Earthquake (Goodbye Better)
Cadaver In Drag
Septic Tank (Elephant Graveyard)
Bentsink
Pre-Cum Fog Ballet (Alcoholic Narcolepsy)
Ghastung
Eve/Deskland + (Aubar)
Mutant Ape/Shitfilth
In Addition To The Blatant Nazi Imagery (Torgid Animal)
Sic Alps
Pleasures And Treasures (Animal Diagnosis)
Lee Rockey
Lee Rockey Music (De Stijl)
Romostupids
The Brutal Birthday (Richie 7")
Shthar
Cut Scales (Fag Tapes)
Weather Exposed Skeleton Music (Dome)
PG Six
Music From The Sherman Box Series And Other Works (Amish)
Joshua Borkett
Where's My Hat (Feather Ones Nest)
The Khan Jamal Creative Arts Ensemble
Drumfource To The Motherland (Eremita)
Bush Arbors
Landscape Of Bone (Three Lobed)

Compiled by Thurston Moore & Andrew Keen, Ecstatic Peace www.ecstaticpeace.com

Gregorian Chart

Bells Of Mariendorf Abbey
Bells Of Mariendorf Abbey (Motette)
Nuns Of Mariendorf Abbey
Compline (1) (Motette)
Nuns Of Mariendorf Abbey
First Vespers (Motette)
Monks Of Prinknash Abbey
Compline (Saydisc)
Nuns Of Stanbrook Abbey
Compline (Saydisc)
Nova Schola Gregoriana
Communiones (Naxos)
Chorallschola Of Dusseldorf
Christmas Mass In The Midnight (Motette)
Nova Schola Gregoriana
Introitus (Nexos)
Benedictine Nuns Of St Cecilias Abbey
Magnificat In Praise Of Mary (Herald)
Abbaye De Solesmes
Solesmes 1930 (Les Editions Musicales De Solesmes)
Monastic Choir Of St Peter's Abbey
Solesmes Te Deum (Hymn) (Paraclete Press)
Monastic Choir Of St Peter's Abbey
Solesmes Christus Factus (Maundy Thursday Resp. Mode 5) (Paraclete Press)
Nova Schola Gregoriana
Offertoire (Nexos)
Monks Of Prinknash Abbey
Abbey Bells And Introit. Spiritus Domini (Pentecost) Mode VIII (Saydisc)
Bells Of Solesmes
Bells Of Solesmes (Paraclete Press)

Compiled by Richard Youngs

Rare Frequency 15

Olivia Blonk
Heave To (Sedimental)
Bunalim
Bunalim (Shadoks)
David Daniell
Coastal (Xenic)
Elon Omon
Marauders (Animal Disguise Recordings)
Hans Grunal's Kraakonkabinet
Another Miserable Day (Ultra-Eczema)
Felix Kubin
Orpheus Psyketron (Bayerischer Rundfunk)
György Kurtág
Jatekok (EMC)
Lithops
Duenes (Sonig)
Bernard Parmegiani
Plain-Temps (INA GRM)
Folke Rabe
What?? (Dexter's Cigar)
Bhob Rainey & Rail Wehowsky
I Don't Think I Can See You Tonight (Sedimental)
Seht & Stelzer
Exactly What You Lost (Intransitive)
Selda
Selda (Fundare Keepers)
Sleeparchive
Hospital Tracks (Sleeparchive)
Mika Vainio
Revolty (Wavetrap)

Compiled by *Rare Frequency* Thursdays 7–10pm EST WZBC 90.3 FM Boston, Massachusetts www.rarefrequency.com

The Office Ambience

Tujiko Noriko
Solo (Editions Mego)
Christa Pfangen
Watch Me Getting Back The End (Die Schachtel)
Michael Cashmore
The Snow Abides (Durtro)
Marginal Consort
Marginal Consort (Improvised Music From Japan)
ConeRosie
The Adventures Of Ghastharse And Stillborn (Touch And Go)
Githead
Art Pop (Swim)
Project Perfect
Pm + (Community Library)
Flower-Corsano Duo
The Radiant Mirror (Textile)
David Gunn & Victor Gama
Folk Songs For The Five Points (New York Tenement Museum)
Deerhoof
Friend Opportunity (ATP)
Dimitri Vandoulis
Nptar 1/Palmae/Nptar 3/Praxis (Pogus)
Glenn Jones
Against Which The Sea Continually Beats (Strange Attractors Audio House)
Flying Lotus
1983 (Plus Research)
Zu & Nobukazu Takemura
Identification With The Enemy A Key To The Underworld (Alevisho)

Compiled by *The Wire* Sound System

We welcome charts from record shops radio shows clubs DJs labels musicians readers etc. Email charts@thewire.co.uk

Rashid Taha's drum corner (see Invisible Jukebox page 70)

SEBASTIEN ARNETTI

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London, UK
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London, UK

The Stooges 2007 Iggy Pop (central) with Ron and Scott Asheton

Motorik sex gods become lunkhead punks. Tony Herrington dismantles the myth making surrounding The Stooges' much anticipated reunion

The Stooges
The Weirdness
VIRGIN CD

The return of The Stooges is a Pyrrhic victory for the Comeback Culture that has been such a blot on the musical landscape ever since the organisers of the All Tomorrows Parties festival realised that All Our Yesterdays was a much better gambit for pulling in the punters and keeping the media interested. At the risk of sounding like LCD Soundsystem's James Murphy, I was there, in Los Angeles 2002, when a handful of ageing white fanboys with names like Thurston, Watt and Mascis suddenly realised they had sufficient power and influence to will back into a being an entity they had worshipped from afar for years but which had been lying dead and buried for more than three decades. And so The Stooges were reanimated in a ceremony that wanted to be a bacchanal celebration of the group's original mix of motorik sex energy, trailer park existentialism and whatever-it-takes showmanship, but that, as a ritual, was as meaningless and mediated as an induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame hosted by The White Stripes.

As is the case with all reanimation fantasies, that version of The Stooges that played at the ATP festival on the UCLA campus five years ago (with a line-up of Ron and Scott Asheton from the original group, plus bassist Mike Watt depping for the late, great Dave Alexander, and a handful of guest vocalists stepping up to the mic in what felt like an alt karaoke runthrough of the group's greatest misses) was a hideous distortion, scrambling and retarding the unique Stooge DNA, removing all the qualities that made *Fun House* such a new paradigm for rock 'n' roll (ie the uncanny application of the dynamics that animated James Brown's late 60s groups), once again reducing it to lowest common denominator punk rawk. They went down a storm, of course. Which meant it would only be a matter of time before Iggy Pop himself came on board, sussing that this reunion was one way to drag himself out of solo career inertia and rake in the kind of bucks and acclaim he was denied 35 years ago, when The Stooges were the most original, and therefore the most hated, rock group on the planet.

And so to *The Weirdness*, which has already been talked about as The Stooges' third LP proper, but what it actually is is the sequel to The Sex Pistols' *Never Mind The Bollocks*. You can thank producer Steve Albini for tracing that warped lineage. Albini is on record as saying that The Pistols' "Holidays In The Sun", their last and most derivative single (sonically, not lyrically), was the first impressive sounding record to come out of punk rock. With *The Weirdness*, Albini finally gets the chance to indulge in a little wish fulfilment fantasy of his own, imagining himself as producer Chris Thomas, manning the board for the *Never Mind The Bollocks* sessions, multitracking Steve Jones's guitar parts into a roaring wall of sound, and beefing up the sound of Paul Cook's four-square drum parts, until the whole thing turns into mirror image of the kind of cocksure rock 'n' roll The Sex Pistols, like The Stooges before them, were supposed to be in the business of exposing and laying to waste.

Supposedly recorded live to capture The Stooges' raw, primal energy, everything about *The Weirdness* sounds premeditated and processed. The drums are so hilariously over the top, each downstroke sounding like a nuclear explosion going off in a world of echo, that John Bonham would reject the mix as being too mecho. The guitars are rendered so raunchy that the ghost of Johnny Thunders must think someone's taking the piss. And the songs are based on a handful of riffs and chord changes so generic and off the cuff The Sheggs would reject them as being too pat. The whole thing sounds like Sonic Youth trying to sound like The Black Crowes trying to sound like The New York Dolls with a producer trying to make it all sound like *Led Zeppelin II* meets *The Great Rock 'N' Roll Swindle*.

In addition to all of the above, something weird has happened to the bass playing of Mike Watt. Just like Steve Jones on *Never Mind The Bollocks*, playing the basslines Sid Vicious couldn't manage by following his own guitar parts exactly, only an octave lower. Watt here follows Ron Asheton's guitar note for note, so the bass is present only as a vague rumble, a removal of the low end that not only sucks all the funk out of the music, but shifts its centre of gravity so high it topples over into cock rock posturing. This is weird because once upon a time Watt was one of the only bass players in rock who seemed to intuitively understand Bootsy Collins's role in The JBs, and understand it so completely he could transpose it to a form that the Godfather himself would have regarded as ofay tomfoolery. On The Minutemen's 1983 *What Makes A Man Start Fires?* the interplay between Watt's bass, D Boon's guitar and George Hurley's drums could have been modelled exactly on the awesome interlocking of Bootsy, guitarist Phelps Collins and drummer Jabo Starks on JB's "Sex Machine". In both instances, the music gains momentum and energy from the way the bass snakes through the static thickets of guitar and percussion, rendering everything funky through lithe, sensual motion. More to the point, this is exactly what Dave Alexander once did for The Stooges. "Little Doll", "Down In The Street" and "Fun House" are among The Stooges' greatest tracks mainly because Alexander located the bassline at hip shaking level so as to move in essential, erotic contremotion to the testosterone-fuelled groin thrusts of the guitar and drum parts.

The main problem for Watt, however, is that he is working with a producer who hates bass, as a signifier of all that is louche, lowdown and funky, and who is in love with the idea of guitars and drums raping and pillaging all before them in a grotesque parody of irresistible male power and aggression.

Talking of grotesque parodies. Iggy Pop on this record sounds like he is sleepwalking through a dream of his younger bad self, muttering about his dick turning into a tree while hanging out at the ATM, or somesuch, and sounding about as convincing and involved as a sixtysomething Mick Jagger lusting after some brown sugar. And that's all there is to say about that.

It's a joke how this record plays fast and loose with everything that was once original about The Stooges' music, twisting the plot so it becomes more fodder for reductionist fantasies of white trash punk rock. To paraphrase Lester Bangs, The Stooges' one true friend back in the day, if you have a sick sense of humour or no standards at all, you'll love it. □

Acoustic Ladyland
Skinny Grin
V2 CD

Fulborn Teversham
Count Herbert II
PICKLED EGG CD

These two groups feature London F-IRE Collectives Seb Roachford, a drummer and composer who claims to play in ten different groups, including Mercury Prize nominees Polar Bear. When attempting to describe these eclectic albums, the Canterbury Scene springs to mind. Not that either of these groups sounds much like Soft Machine or Hatfield And The North, but they both attempt to ally jazz chops to a rock sensibility.

The most compelling aspect of *Skinny Grin* is that, although there's a hint of early 80s No Wave about it (James Chance even guests on "Salt Water", mixed, incidentally, by Scott Walker), the music is played with tremendous energy, while avoiding any sort of 'fake jazz' archness. Roachford's amazing drumming rolls along in a freewheeling manner but with syncopation and rock precision. Pete Wareham (saxophone) and Tom Cawley (keyboards) aren't averse to occasional hardcore riffs or violent upheavals. But the skronk and splatter quotient is balanced by the melodious saxophone on tracks like "Red Sky". There are real songs, too – Alice Grant fronts "Paris" with insolent tones, while Wareham sings on the brief title track, which sounds uncannily like *Pink Flag*-era Wire.

Alan Freeman used to play the most extraordinary music on BBC radio in the late 70s, once mixing The Slits and Henry Cow with classic rock cuts. He might have gone big on Fulborn Teversham (Roachford's group with Wareham and Grant), as they sound like a cross between those groups in places. *Count Herbert II* is another fascinating and vital collection. With Nick Ramm on keyboards – a bizarre mix of end-of-pier organ recital, avant splurges, drones and Ron Geesin's capricious vignettes for 70s school TV programmes – this set is sparser but just as tough. On "Off Song" meanwhile, Grant tells us to "*F off*" with a degree of style that's actually quite charming.

MIKE BARNES

Myléna Bergeron
Chronopée (2)
ORAL CD

It remains one of the great mysteries of modern life: a disturbing failure of both design and desire: who actually drinks Clamato? No one ever offers you a Clamato, you never encounter anyone expressing a wish to drink one. The contents of people's shopping trolleys remain innocent of Clamato in supermarkets, and yet there they are lining the shelves. What gives? Are we all missing out by denying ourselves the taste of tomato juice mixed with the natural goodness of, um, grainy digital noise. Probably best to leave this one on the shelf.

KEN HOLLINGS

Maurizio Bianchi
Elisionem
KLANGGALERIE CD

Dedicated to the interfered, experimental period of German composer Giselher Klebe, in particular his mid-50s dodecaphonic works at Darmstadt and his copious radiophonic output, this new work from revered Italian post-industrialist Maurizio Bianchi as usual gauzes itself in a flurry of psycho-neural conundrums, the gist of which centres upon the process of absorbing various sonorous elements into one. In this respect, *Elisionem* harks back to the cyclic Ambient exorcism (in particular *Cycles* and *Anterotic Mosaic*) of the frenzied activity following Bianchi's return to music in 1998 after a lengthy, self-imposed religious exile. *Elisionem* is also interspersed with particular nods to his bionic and mid-80s filmic phase (on *Endometrio* and *Armeghiddon* respectively).

The kinetic, radiating energy of opener "Proteic Suppression" contains itself in an almost intestinal but cold, astral quality. Meanwhile the pervading anatomical theme of the five pieces is typified by the marriage of oscillating washes of isolationist ambience and creeping viral spread of "Syllabic Microbes". A far cry, of course, from Bianchi's harsh, concretist Sacher Pelz moniker, but one that adheres to the old, trusty electroacoustic canon in its methodology, manipulating sound elements that by themselves have little significance but, when amalgamated, turn into a sinister yet scintillating modern alchemy.

RICHIE RUCHPAUL

Boris With Michio Kurihara
Rainbow
PEDAL CD

As many have already pointed out, it's pretty damn hard to know what to expect from a new Boris album. There are at least four different Borises in circulation, after all: Boris the down-'n'-dirty garage rockers, Boris the Sabbath-worshipping doom revenants, Boris the ass-quaking feedback droners, Boris the noisefreak Merzbow collaborators. *Pink*, last year's Southern Lord outing, even suggested the emergence of a fifth: Boris the post-Grunge rock superstars, presumably located somewhere between Soundgarden and Deftones on the eternally slippery scale of 'guilty pleasures'. For their latest incarnation, though, Boris have enlisted the talents of White Heaven/Marble Sheep/Ghost guitarist Michio Kurihara for a psyched-out trip through the acid-damaged epoch of the late 1960s.

At this point it's advisable to relinquish any preconception of what Boris *should* sound like. Opener "Rafflesia" thunders in on the kind of growling, hypnotic Tony Iommi by way of Kevin Shields riff that characterised *Pink*, but this is something of a red herring, as most of *Rainbow* is taken up by airy West Coast psych-rock with the occasional folkish tinge. Kurihara's fluid yet corrosive guitar invests each song with an edge that would normally be provided by Wata's fiendishly heavy monster riffage, or an extended voyage to the distant reaches of feedback heaven. That said, there are a couple of exceptions. "Reator Difuso" suggests that, were shoegazing left solely in the charge of Boris, that scene would have had a lot more about it to celebrate; while "Once No 1" blasts Bo Diddley into interstellar overdrive, recasting the penetrative thrust of blues rock as a boiling, ever-shifting pool of androgynous sound. Blissful.

JOSEPH STANNARD

Brother Ali
The Undisputed Truth
RHYMESAYERS CD

He can be sensational ("*I identify with a slave wishing to break free/He was victimised by the same system that raped me*"), but most times Minneapolis MC Brother Ali is a fierce battle rapper and a deep soul. A "*self appointed judge with power vested to hand down sentences from bus stop benches*", Ali boasts punchlines plentiful on "Pedigree", his delivery raspy on the verses but smooth like Snoop's on the chorus, even glissing his final-foot syllables. He struggles with ascetic backpacker values on "Lookin' At Me Sideways" ("*I ain't even here to get clandestine/But best believe I'm a get what's destined*") and carps about Bush with police state like self-preservationel urgency ("*Had this dream where I go nuts/Dial 911 from the roof and post up*"). But Ali's best work here just as with 2003's "Forest Whitaker", a song about being albino, is personal and self-critical, first "Faheem", his apology to his son with a Ghostface like ear for specificity ("*cleaning mouse droppings out of your toys*"), then two wrenched raps about his ex-wife.

Rhymesayers' in-house beatmaker Anthony Davis (aka Ant) handles all *The Undisputed Truth*'s fantastic production, smartly pairing reggae to personal freedom anthems ("Truth Is") and a sparse porchside blues riff to the rant "Uncle Sam Goddamn", barely-there foot taps and all.

NICK SYLVESTER

Carnival Skin
Carnival Skin
NERU CD

Carnival Skin is a quintet of New Yorkers: free jazz veterans Perry Robinson (clarinet) and Hilliard Greene (bass) meet Bruce Eisenbeil (guitar), Klaus Kugel (drums) and Peter Evans (trumpet). The quintet evolved in 2004: the happy coincidence of mutual connections on the New York improvisation scene and, for a group that fell into place by accident, their horse-sure sense of how to move together as an ensemble is remarkable to witness.

There are six tracks – one composition from each member, and a valedictory free for all to close. Perry Robinson's "Journey To Strange" sounds like the lead sheets for Monk's "Four In One" and Ornette Coleman's "Turnaround" got superimposed in the photocopier. Robinson belongs to an era when reed players made definitive statements, and the intensity of his sound – an electrically blue, perpetually inquisitive raspy tone that has no respect for boundaries – is testament that he's a one-off. Evans's bottle metallic strut sporadically bolsters Robinson's line, before both men unleash racing-cart solos.

Hilliard Greene's spiritually optimistic lament "Iona" has a lineage that looks back to Coltrane's "Crescent". Greene's proudly bel canto bowed bass leads, until the rest of the ensemble feed off it like a circuit board, with Eisenbeil's wild tremolo guitar gluing the monolith together. Evans and Robinson weave gnarled up counterpoint and make an occasional bid for solo freedom, but it's now that the group's ability to twist and turn with a unified sense of direction seems most honed. Evans's abstracted, deadpan blues "Monster" is another highlight of this compelling, incessantly surprising album.

PHILIP CLARK

!!!
Myth Takes
WARP CD

While the smartest, most self-sufficient participants in the loosely delineated punk-funk scene have long since deserted the sinking ship, a couple of groups are still hanging on for dear life. The Rapture have already underwhelmed with their third album, stripping their music of its charm and chutzpah and relaunching themselves as a straightforward party outfit, while LCD Soundsystem's second effort will inevitably gain plaudits for not being quite as terrible as many had feared. But multi-state funkateers !!! are most likely too proud to simplify their sound for the sake of a hit, and they certainly don't have anything like the cast iron subcultural cachet of LCD/DFA mainman James Murphy. And the absence of any scene – however illusory – means they have little to fall back on this time around.

On 2004's *Louden Up Now*, producer Maurice Fulton managed to distract from the group's less engaging qualities – Nic Offer's cringeworthy lyricism, a tendency to stretch songs past the point of usefulness – by applying an E-head's attention to detail to their polyrhythmic workouts. Hence average songs like "Pardon My Freedom" and "When The Going Gets Tough The Tough Get Karazee" were transformed into superlative tracks, a series of physiological tics available to the listener for instant sampling. *Myth Takes* is produced by bass player Justin Van Der Volgen, and while he exhibits an undeniably inventive touch in his enthusiasm for dubwise FX and textural juxtaposition, the album lacks the cyberkinetic sparks of its predecessor: it's merely another indie dance record with some neat sounds, a couple of decent songs (the title track, "All My Heroes Are Weirdos") and a great deal of well-played, directionless filler.

JOE STANNARD

Dälek
Abandoned Language
IPECAC CD

If this New Jersey duo have a motto, it would probably run along the lines of: "If it ain't broke, let's break it". Best known for the all-out sonic and verbal assaults of 2002's *From Filthy Tongue Of Gods And Griots* and 2005's *Absence*, this third release on Ipecac represents a significant departure – on first

Daphne Oram
Oramics
PARADIGM DISCS 2xCD
Lily Greenham
Lingual Music
PARADIGM DISCS CD

Two sonic artists, both different in almost all respects other than being neglected, almost forgotten, both women and both based in England, neither of them living, and both now reconstructed through the fragments of sound that have remained as traces of two complex lives. As with all archive projects hedged by incomplete sources, there is a sense of privileged gazing, the battered scrapbook lying open, the photo album partially revealed, a glimpse through to the hidden person, and pathos: those few moments when access to the inner sanctum was granted: a temporary opening of microphones in a BBC radio studio, a concert in some official palace of the high arts.

Inevitably, the simultaneous release of these retrospectives acts as a reproach to the flawed utopianism of post-war music. Within the male technocracy of electronic music and masculine, even combative world of sound poetry, women were considered rare exotics: their presence and difference highlighting the pathetic subjectivity of aesthetic choices that a male majority battled among themselves to dignify as Theory and Law.

A composer and inventor of the Oramics 'drawn sound' system, Daphne Oram is currently the better known of the two, if only because the kind of early electronic music in which she specialised is now fetishised. Her major work, *Four Aspects*, composed in 1960 and described by Hugh Davies as an uncanny anticipation of Brian Eno's *Discreet Music*, was a genuine glimpse into one version of the future. Another futurism: the 1960s techno-paradise, has become insufferably cute and kitsch as illustrated by the current use of Raymond Scott's *Baltimore Gas and Electric Co ("395")* for a TV commercial by the beleaguered online bank, Egg. Before his unexpected death in 2005, Hugh Davies had plans to catalogue the Oram archive, of which he was custodian, and prepare material for release. He had noted the CD issue in 2000 of Scott's advertising jingles, film collaborations and musique concrète experiments from the 1950s–60s and believed Oram's largely unknown work to be a British equivalent.

Having worked within the BBC, first as a balance engineer during World War Two, then as a founder member of the Radiophonic Workshop in 1958, Oram had to supplement the financing of her studio by making short electronic pieces for radio and television commercials. Themes of machine futurism – leisure through robotics, labour-saving devices and miracle substances – surface only too easily in her jingles for Atlas Copco power tools, Lego, English Electric washing machines, Nestea instant tea and Schweppes Kia Ora. These were recorded between 1962 and 1966, which suggests that sonic experimenters of my generation were almost certainly affected by them at an impressionable age (is our vintage of experimental music just another side-effect of media manipulation, re Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*?).

Predictably, these vignettes are charming but rather one dimensional. Her music for dramas of a more philosophical nature – plays by Professor Fred Hoyle and Arthur Ademov – is necessarily episodic, but evident within the grain and fracture, ominous, melancholy, dystopian, of these distorted micro-compositions, spread over two CDs, is the sense of a composer who never found resources or support to extend her potential. No, the future is not always bright.

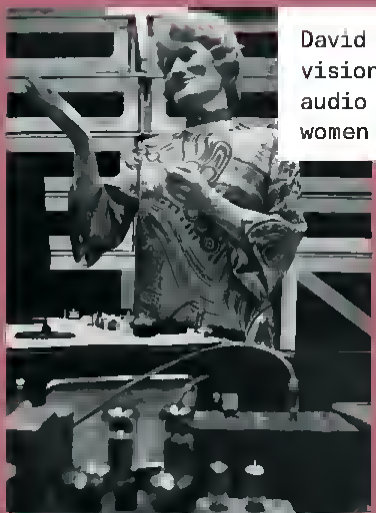
Lily Greenham lived a very different story. Born in Vienna, she studied painting in Paris. Returning to Vienna for further study, she encountered experimental writers such as Gerhard Rühm, and her performance of a text piece by Rühm and Konrad Bayer is the earliest unreleased tape included in this collection. A permanent move to London came in 1972 and, though insistent on her independence from all classification, she was a familiar, dynamic, wryly humorous and often humanising figure on the sound poetry scene, then centred at the Poetry Society in Earl's Court. King of that court was Bob Cobbing, and the first of these CDs opens with her reading his *ABC in Sound*, the date 1968, the listeners apparently teenage and highly amused by the whole thing. Perhaps the setting was a school. Her commitment to audience feedback and abilities as a natural communicator are evident, though the discomfiting aspect of sound poetry – robust historically logical yet still faintly ridiculous – anticipates its declining prospects within the performing arts.

Bob Cobbing described her as a performer, not a poet. The distinction seems contrary to his own rejection of art categories and is not borne out by the material collected for this release. Her interest in process art, or 'programmed art' as she described it in 1995, is consistently pursued through experiments with visual geometric patterns, magic figures, grids, and what she described as 'lingual music'. In collaborations with Paddy Kingsland and flautist/saxophonist Bob Downes and his Open Music group, she accumulated dense patterns of sound derived from speech: narrated texts, multilingual phrases, single words (a keyword, she called this) or sounds extracted from elements of speech. Repetition, either electronically generated or vocally performed in real time, gives the best of these pieces a hypnotic quality, a slow build to overloaded density during which meaning erodes yet lingers as traces in language fog.

Assessing the work on these two double CDs with any objectivity is difficult. Painstakingly curated and nicely presented, they burst with ideas, energy, venture into territory only barely explored before, moments of absolute clarity and inspiration. Obscurity clouds the issue just as much as tape deterioration or incomplete documentation, and though an understanding of 20th century audio culture is partial without access to work by innovative, important if marginal figures such as Oram and Greenham, a feeling persists: these are sonic remnants of frustrated ambitions, lives which drifted out of earshot and now return in a compressed, somehow indecipherable form. □

KEITH HARDING (ORAM)

Frustrated ambitions: Lily Greenham (left), Daphne Oram



David Toop recovers past visions of the future from the audio fragments of two English women in experimental music

listen, at least. While not exactly packed with club bangers or radio friendly hooks *Abandoned Language* sees Dälek newly focused on melody, structure and cohesion.

From the corroded boom-bap beats of the ten minute title track to the haunting string section of "Isolated State", it's clearly a complex and unsettling kind of refinement, no longer relying on excoriating noise but instead on swirling synth passages, multilayered drones and dissonant counterpoints.

Producer The Oktopus (Alap Momin) continually spins sounds off its axis, creating a slippery, warped quality, frequently reminiscent of a locked-groove record with the hole punched slightly left of centre. Meanwhile turntablist scribbles by guest artist DJ Rob Swift serve as a reminder of the music's roots while twisting, like ivy, around MC Dälek's (Will Brooks) already knotty rhymes. Often kept way down in the mix, these vocals are opaque, shrouded and initially easy to overlook, but, like a childhood game of pass the parcel, stripping away the layers slowly reveals them to be right at this album's core.

DAVE STELFOX

David Karsten Daniels
Sharp Teeth
FATCAT CD

With a background including youthful hymn singing, university studies in composition and improvisation, and the foundation of North Carolina's Bu_Hanan label, David Karsten Daniels arrives at FatCat as a kind of junior Jim O'Rourke, a musical polymath whose records have the potential to spiral off in any or every direction. Yet Daniels's fourth album seems deliberately understated, favouring a studied, contemplative Southern folk where his acoustic guitar and nasal vocals are embellished, but rarely overwhelmed, by swirling strings and sauntering Dixieland brass.

At times, *Sharp Teeth* feels a little too chill and academic to convince as either heady musical cocktail or rusty back porch whimsy. The Will Oldham vocal drags with which Daniels croaks "Beast" come over as a deliberate genre exercise, as do the two spare muted piano interludes that share the album's title. Instead he's at his best when casting himself as a fragile fatalist, recalling baseball games as a metaphor for life's unfairness on "American Pastime", or wondering, in "We Go Right On", whether his relationships are doomed by *"an inability to do anything but what we are designed to do"*, times when the music's meticulousness provides a low-key yet assured platform for his introspection.

AMY BLESS

DIOIDIOIDI
Ghost Temple
PSF CD

When The Rolling Stones played their landmark concert in Shanghai in 2006, they found themselves victims of Chinese governmental authoritarianism. Risqué favourites like "Brown Sugar", "Honky Tonk Woman" and "Let's Spend The Night Together" had to be dropped or the show would not go on. While Beijing no longer has the totalitarian hold it once did over its people and culture, the shackles have yet to be completely slackened. All the more remarkable that China has produced someone like Li Jianhong, arguably his country's eminent noise operative. Li has released several records on his own 2pi imprint, both solo and with avant rock group Second Skin, as well curating the annual 2pi noise festival in his home city of Hangzhou.

For DIOIDIOIDI's *Ghost Temple*, he is joined by drummer Huang Jin for a brain frying set of free noise improvisations. The duo's youthful energy obliterates all that stands in its way. Li's guitar scree often dissolves into a puréed banshee wail of insectoid buzz, before launching into some psych-solo action which suggests a maniac cuckoo clock. All the while Huang desperately hangs on, with a lexicon of tom tom battery and cymbal splatter, before the pair collapse into an exhausted heap.

Maybe the lack of lyrical content protracts DIOIDIOIDI from outside interference or maybe it's because their activities fall beneath the radar. Whatever it is, long may it continue.

SPENCER GRADY

Dragon Or Emperor
Dragon Or Emperor
PICKLED EGG CD

The One Ensemble
Wayward The Fourth
SECRET EYE CD

Volcano The Bear
Egg And Two Books
VTVD CD

Volcano The Bear are going through a particularly prolific period at the moment, both together and individually, and this current batch of releases offers an interesting insight into how their extracurricular activities feed into their parent group. That none of these albums is remotely similar shows just how wide VTB cast their net.

Take Dragon Or Emperor. Aaron Moore's duo with fellow traveller Stewart Brackley. They are a bass and drums punk/jazz/Metal powerhouse, but with a spontaneous feel that frequently threatens to spill over into hysteria. This is partly down to Brackley's monstrous, distended fuzz bass riffs, but has more to do with his wild evocation of what it might sound like if Yamataka Eye had found himself trapped in the body of David Thomas. But there's more here than all out assault. Moore's drums get pretty aggro at times, but he also does a nice line in Klaus Dinger/Jaki Liebezeit-style tom tom trance-outs ("Fast Apache") not to mention his exquisitely incongruous piano and trumpet interjections.

On the face of it, The One Ensemble – set up by VTB's Daniel Padden after he relocated from Leicester to Glasgow – could hardly be further removed from D Or E. It's a sort of Fourth World chamber-folk quartet, a rough amalgam of the Fred Frith of *Gravity* or *Step Across The Border*, early Penguin Cafe Orchestra and a troupe of Balkan Gypsies. As with Dragon Or Emperor and VTB, it keeps throwing up surprises, just when you think you've got it sussed, deconstructing itself as it goes along. "Joker Burlesque" opens on a tightly arranged passage for dark, swooning strings, then shifts abruptly into a Russian cabaret knees-up, before dissolving into a strangely amorphous soundscape of scratchy bowed harmonics and kazoo.

Egg And Two Books documents VTB at Leicester's Phoenix Theatre in 2006, their first performance in four years as a full quartet. With Padden busy in Glasgow and Clarence Manuelo taking a sabbatical, the group had been performing as the duo of Moore and Nick Mott for some time, but the success of *Classic Erasmus Fusion* seems to have galvanised the group into full scale performances once more. What's most interesting is how Padden and Moore's work outside the group has impacted on VTB. Padden's interest in folksong, clearly defined musical themes and acoustic instrumentation is evident throughout. Moore, meanwhile, has been emboldened enough by his adventures in D Or E to introduce some Heavy Metal thunder into old favourites like "Hairy Queen". Mott and Manuelo meanwhile ensure that the dada quotient remains high, with the latter's tape manipulations coming across particularly strongly.

KEITH MOLINÉ

Einstürzende Neubauten
Klaviermusik
MUSTERHAUS CD

Stimmen Reste
MUSTERHAUS CD

According to Einstürzende Neubauten, the subscriber-only Musterhaus series is "intended to give the band an outlet for more experimental impulses and exploration". While this might appear to be a superfluous exercise for an outfit who have based a career on doggedly pursuing their instincts, it's worth observing that their Web-only releases have thrown up a fair amount of excellent music. 2005's *Grundstueck* being a notable example.

By comparison, *Klaviermusik*, the sixth in the series, is a diverting yet inessential release, consisting chiefly of pianist Ari Benjamin Meyer's interpretations of material written by Neubauten members. A couple of the pieces offer more than novelty value. "Kinderladenklavier" undergoes a gradual sonic shift from insectoid army trudge to submerged Burundi battery with admirable subtlety, while "Burleske Fuer 6 Haende" offsets an anorexic ve-va voom figure with AMM-style timbral clattering. However, the project is somewhat stifled by an air of academic respectability. His performance is technically impressive yet only sporadically possessed of genuine exploratory zeal.

The seventh release, *Stimmen Reste*, on the other hand, finds Blixa Bargeld & co dirtying their hands in time-honoured fashion, hammering and caressing the raw material of the human voice like so much scrap metal. "Kernstück", abstracted from the "Vox Populi" section of *Grundstueck*, is the album's centrepiece. A vast intoxicating drone featuring a 100-strong "social choir" and piledriving industrial percussion, it's a fine example of Neubautens undiminished capacity for noise-into-awe alchemy. The remainder of the album isn't quite as striking, but additional delights such as the resigned lullaby "Tohuwabohu", the playful "Semiotische Musik No 5" and the fleeting electronic beauty of "Grillen" make it a more worthwhile acquisition than its piano based companion.

JOSEPH STANNARD

El-P
I'll Sleep When You're Dead
DEFINITIVE JUX CD/LP

Dystopic – a crutch descriptive for Brooklyn producer/MC El-P's dark and dense sound-collage beats – is only half the story on this, his follow-up to 2002's *Fantastic Damage*. Sonically, this is dystopia via absurd democracy. Take opener "Tasmanian Pain Coaster", wherein El-P gives vocal cut-ups horrorflick screams, splashes of piano, electric guitar solos and horn solos the same prominence in the mix, trampling over each other for our attention. It's overwhelming but ultimately exhilarating, mainly since El-P's vocal delivery winds in and out of this sonic mess rather than floating above it all. He doesn't speak in enjambed rhymes so much as sentences that happen to rhyme in the right spots, which suits him fine on the environmentally obsessed "Drive" (*"You call them windows/I call them asbestos lesseners"*) and even better on the free-associative earth scorcher "Everything Must Go" (*"Automaton bells rise well from Death Valley, shit we all mingle and dig/Mass graves for the kids, clash with the combat rap set"*).

New York comes up a lot both lyrically and sonically, an appropriate battleground for the album's titular unrest, be it over art making, science or cultural politics. In that last regard, he's his own worst critic, commenting on his own lyrical approach, *"where everything has a meaning but none of it makes sense"*. Cat Power, Trent Reznor, The Mars Volta and others contribute, but they're all swallowed whole by El-P's universe of uncertainty.

NICK SYLVESTER

Electrelane
No Shouts, No Calls
TOO PURE CD

British female rock quartet Electrelane – formerly from Brighton but now dispersed around the globe – recorded their second and third albums in Chicago with Steve Albini and then took a sabbatical. They reconvened last summer in Berlin to write fresh songs. That songwriting should not take long, you might say, basing your remark on Electrelane's previous history as primal rock jammers whose first album, the mighty *Rocket To The Moon*, contained few vocals apart from the odd spontaneous scream. But you'd be wrong, for Electrelane's fourth offering sashays firmly towards pop song euphoria, while retaining an interest in Sonic Youth-type rock improv.

Opener "The Greater Times" gets straight to the point with a well wrought melody – *"Since I found you, I'm tearing down the walls"* – and the high gleam of harmony vocals. It's not a case of pussy over-neatness – Emma Gaze is still on drums for God's sake – but there's a twinkle in Electrelane's eye as dainty as the twinkling guitar figures that open "To The East". There's hardly a track on which someone isn't caught enjoying themselves singing harmonies. The unison vocals and hoo-oo-ing of "After The Call" tip a hat to Phil Spector-period Chantelles, while Verity Susman's Farfisa organ on "Train 21" ushers in an uplifting chant, soon swollen by an extra voice that I found to be my own. Electrelane take a contagious, unabashed pleasure in their search for pop ecstasy, and there isn't a duff track here. "Five" continues their tradition of pummelling a drone into submission, while "Cut And Run" may not be The Magnetic Fields but it does have a ukulele on it. Warm, honest and fun to be around, *No Shouts, No Calls* is a hats-in-the-air success.

CLIVE HELL

www.hathut.com Without music, life would be a mistake. (Friedrich Nietzsche 1844–1900)

The Fall
Reformation Post TLC
SLOGAN/SANCTUARY CD

The problem with trying to avoid what he calls "the artist syndrome" is that you sometimes end up with the anti artist syndrome, which is a whole lot duller. Mark E Smith has fallen off his tightrope just often enough to keep it real and convincing. He and The Fall manage to stay about as far ahead of the critical blah as anyone in – or out of – the business.

Most of *Reformation Post TLC* is untouchably good, even grand. Smith's longstanding insistance that what is important is the man rather than the music stands up well. 14 tracks are faxed in direct from wherever he's at right now – I'd guess somewhere a bit happier than a while ago. The current line-up, with partner Elena Poulou on keys, Tim Pressley guitar, Rob Barbato bass and Orpheo McCord drums, sounds like it knows its place. If there's nothing quite as dangerously good as "Pacifying Joint" on *Fall Heads Roll* there's also none of the sellconscious experimentalism that used to punctuate the old stuff.

And yet there's a tongue-in-cheek quality here as well. In place of the old Stooges routine, something perilously closer to The Jon Spencer Blues Explosion. After the opening cackle and cheerfully dour incantations of "Dvorl Dvorl" and "Reformation", there's the familiar jangle of "Full Sound", which is the closest thing to generic Fall on the record. Then wouldn't you know it, we're jamming on Merle Haggard's "White Line Fever", an eavesdropped rehearsal by the sound of it. "Insult Song" is a free-associating group intro/outro that has them up in the California hills kvetching and bickering, listening to that LA music, meeting famous writers and paying vinegary tribute to Dudley Moore. It's classic Smith and, like any great pub routine, you hope you won't have to hear it again.

Shorn of the miniatures such as "Coach And Horses" and "Das Boat", *Reformation Post TLC* would be spanner-tight and wonderful. As it is, there's a slack nut here and there, and I don't mean him or his missus.

BRIAN MORTON

Faust
In Autumn
DIRTER 3xCD+DVD

The recent death of Faust conceptualist and producer Uwe Nettelbeck marked a closing chapter in the career of Krautrock's perennial vandals. Having long been estranged from Hans Joachim Irmler, who is currently leading an "alternative" version of the group, it seems their heart has finally fluttered off into the ether, leaving a kind of nostalgic shell, an empty vessel for the accumulation of the audience's desire for something greater and more vital than their everyday lives could offer. So while they gas, hurl dung at and otherwise playfully victimise their long suffering following, Faust must be aware that they are engaged in a dramatisation of confrontation devoid of real menace or subversion.

And why not? This, my friends, is rock 'n roll, and Faust always were the most rock 'n roll of the late 60s wave of German experimental groups. This four disc set of live performances from 2005 is an excellent document of the faux communal exorcism Faust have come to represent, being several damn good times rolled into one beautiful package. It's hard to begrudge the crafty old coves this release, even if it means sitting through more than one version of "It's A Bit Of A Pain" (never a pleasure, always a chore) and witnessing the somewhat incongruous participation of Brighton grit group The Pipettes on the truly awful "I Got My Car And My TV". One for the faithful.

JOSEPH STANNARD

Dan Froberg
15 Songs (Down At Jinxey's)
FYLKINGEN CD

Though Dan Fröberg constructs his songs from the captured sounds of the world around him, apparently he prefers to think of them as folk music rather than musique concrète: field recordings or sound art. Folk music is an apt description given the emphasis he places on the sounds people make in everyday life. "Song One (Down Memory Lane)" begins with a child laughing and ends, two minutes later, with a clap of thunder and the sound of a large group of adults laughing. In between, a woman haltingly sings a wordless melody accompanied by a thumb piano, there are atmospheric crackles and wind whips the microphone as a storm rapidly approaches. Whereas the child's laughter sounds carefree, the laughter of the adults strikes a forced, almost hysterical note. Is this a nostalgic piece (as the subtitle suggests) about lost innocence, or is it about the anxiety of losing oneself in the crowd? Fröberg isn't giving the game away. Only five of the 15 tracks have explanatory subtitles, but one of them – "Song Four (Shoe Rainbow)" – remains stubbornly opaque.

If we find the concatenations of sounds in these pieces as fascinating as Fröberg does we'll creatively engage with them and supply the narrative links he doesn't wish to provide. But it's just as tempting to let the sounds slip by, enjoying them for what they are, as one cloud follows another across an azure sky. In avoiding the literalness of field recordings, the transformations of musique concrète and the high seriousness of most sound art, Fröberg has produced works that are playful, delicate, pleasing and rather puzzling.

BRIAN HARLEY

Ben Frost
Theory Of Machines
BEDROOM COMMUNITY CD

"I'm interested in ugly sounds, cold sounds" writes Ben Frost, from Melbourne, Australia but resident since 2005 in Reykjavik, Iceland. But, as Steve Albini will tell you, it's the rawest, nastiest sounds, the ones that make you wonder whether your speakers need replacing, that need the most studio time.

Frost's manipulation of software was impressive enough on his 2003 outing *Steelwound* (Room40), but here, under the watchful eye of Lawrence English and producer Valgeir Sigurðsson (Björk, Bonnie 'Prince' Billy, Nico Muhly), it's simply awesome. On "We Love You Michael Gira" – the title reminds us that minimalism was never just the polished sheen of Reich and Glass, but also the sweat and grime of Gira's Swans – a distressingly regular beep inspired by the sound of a reversing truck evolves into a gentle piano pulse, and a brutal metallic guitar gives way to a string quartet, itself replaced by a dirty sample from Swans' "Red Sheet". Stripping away the technology reveals a deeper darker minimalism, a disarmingly simple descending minor scale fragment worthy of Henryk Góracki and Arvo Pärt. But this is Pärt as arranged by Trent Reznor: the emotional power of Frost's music comes precisely from the stark contrast between extremely basic material and the deadly virtual instruments he invents to perform it. On "Stomp", a gloomy thudding bass is gradually obliterated by lacerating guitar to create something as menacing and claustrophobic as a dark corridor in *Lost Highway* – David Lynch is, not surprisingly, another Frost hero.

In the closing, magnificent "Forgetting You Is Like Breathing Water" (title courtesy Stina Nordenstam), the inhuman precision of icy synths morphs almost imperceptibly into the tenderness and fragility of real instruments whose eternally rising minor scales overlap to form subtly changing harmonies as immaculate and unspoiled as the barren beauty of Frost's adopted country.

DAN WARBURTON

Carlos Giffoni
Arrogance
NO FUN CD

Since organising the first No Fun Fest in Brooklyn in 2004, Carlos Giffoni has been busier and busier, expanding No Fun into a label while performing and recording with Nels Cline, Chris Corsano, Jim O'Rourke, Prurient and as part of trio Monotract. On previous solo releases like 2005's *Welcome Home*, Giffoni has made a point of being a purely digital noise producer. These five notional meditations on human arrogance set the laptop kaleidoscopics aside for a stripped down excursion into analogue synth improv.

Throughout, Giffoni searches out and then dwells on those nodes or nexuses in among a synth's infinite combinations of settings, where tone and white noise blend unhappily, like oil and water. He's happy to etch out thin singularities of sound, where so much noise output tries to saturate the full sonic spectrum, and it gives *Arrogance* a boldness and clarity, for all the sludgy static in which it's swathed. "No More Air" lives up to its name with suffocating shifts and filter sweeps that seem to suck sound back out of the eardrums and into the speakers. Its title could be (but almost certainly isn't) a declaration of war on any French lounge futurists with similar synth interests. It's more the psychic flipside to (or comedown after) the warm analogue bubblebaths of DFAs Delia & Gavin. "I Always Lie" describes long, near ecstatic arcs of tone corkscrewing through filters and phasing before diverting into near bathetic squirts and burbles. Tracks succeed each other without a break for breath, so that their boundaries begin to dissolve. The level only drops off with "The Snake Rises", where Giffoni sinks into a slough of monotonous gargling, which closing track "A Proper End" cannot get out of.

SAM DAVIES

Grinderman
No Pussy Blues
MUTE CD

Throughout his career, Nick Cave's music has become so slow at times, it's sounded close to

conking out. On 2001's *No More Shall We Part*, one becomes desperate for a frisson of excitement to invigorate its trudging pace. His last studio album *The Lyre Of Orpheus/Abattoir Blues* (2004) – a vivid, powerful double set – bucked this trend, and at a London concert a year ago Cave united with Bad Seeds Warren Ellis (violin/bouzouki), Jim Sclavunos (drums) and Martyn Casey (bass) in a vicious, back-to-basics assault on his back catalogue. This quartet have since become Grinderman.

Howlin' Wolf coined the phrase "Low down and dirty" to describe his own group, but as this album's title suggests, it's also a perfect description of Grinderman. In his youth, fronting The Birthday Party, Cave threw himself bodily into the fray. But now in middle age there are different ways to shake some action as he demonstrates on the title track. *"I changed the sheets on my bed/I combed the hairs across my head/I sucked in my gut/And still she said that she just didn't want to."* Cave reads his lover poetry, does some DIY, the washing up, even sinks a litre of cognac to fire himself up, but the object of his desire remains resolutely unimpressed.

All this to a soundtrack that harnesses the ominous bass rumble of "Tupelo", accelerated to the pace of The Birthday Party's "Dead Joe". Sclavunos knocks the bare bones of rock 'n' roll together with Casey's fuzz bass and Ellis's FX-fuelled violin, feeding back in squelling currents. This minimal, boiled down approach continues with Ellis's electronic loops pushed to the fore on "Electric Alice" completed with distorted organ lines.

"Depth Charge Ethel" is a run-of-the-mill warning about some crazy chick, but "Grinderman" is stripped back to the core with Casey's bass emulating the sound of malfunctioning machinery, while Cave gives cryptic insights into this enigmatic character. This formidable collection – timed exactly right at 40 minutes – is up with Cave's very best.

NIKE BARNES

David Grubbs & Susan Howe
Souls Of The Labadie Tract
BLUE CHOPSTICKS CD

Given the power of her readings and the role that sound plays in Howe's poetry, it shouldn't have been surprising that Susan Howe and David Grubbs's *Threfth* (2005) was such a strange and rewarding listen. Recordings of poetry read or performed with music often trouble ear and mind with incompatible demands. *Threfth* struck a careful balance between textual and musical information, with Grubbs allowing Howe's precise delivery of her difficult texts to unfold within a sensitive musical context.

On that CD, the version of *Thorow*, Howe's late 80s poem of landscape and colonial violence, used drone-like tones to provide a discreet but expressive foil for the poem. Grubbs again uses extended tones on *Souls Of Labadie Tract*. His instruments are an antique synth and two varieties of Asian mouth organ – the khaen baet and khaen jet. As with *Threfth*, the relative restriction of the musical palette serves the text well. Modulating, fading and swelling subtly, the overlapping tones don't pull the listener's attention away from Howe's text. Instead there's a recursive feel to the music, as similar sonic shapes reappear in different forms. Buoyed by Grubbs's insistent tones, the listener is drawn into a searching linguistic and musical encounter.

Howe, 70 this year, is currently writing lyric poetry of great energy and percipience. *Souls Of The Labadie Tract* is a characteristically dense weave of thought and sound, the use of the pronoun you and odd little cries of *"oh"* lending the work a surprising intimacy. (The poem will be published in book form later this year, so listeners have nothing but sound to go on for now.) The starting point is a utopian sect, the Labadists, who in the late 17th century set up a community in a parcel of land in northern Maryland. The poetry gains purchase on the contemporary American disaster obliquely, directing our attention at gaps in the historical record and long vanished strains of dissenting thought. With this CD, such lacunae are exposed to new attention as sounds and meanings proceed along their intertwining paths.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Anthony Guerra & Matthew Nidek
White Eagle
FOXGLOVE CD-R

The Green Blossoms
Stones And Ecstasy
PSEUDO ARCANA CD-R

Vodka Sparrows
Death A Thousand Times Over
BLACK PETAL CD-R

American drummer Matthew Nidek has been one of Australian guitarist Anthony Guerra's most enduring collaborators. They've released a small batch of CD-Rs that float off in different directions, from tender extemporisations on Guerra's reflective songs, as on 2008's *Brand New Love*, to brutal blasts, documented most potently by 2005's *nb: White Eagle*, was recorded over two days early in 2005 with Guerra and Nidek on strong form. Guerra shooting loops across the recording space as bedrock for Nidek's impressively agile free percussion. Ultimately, though, Nidek really propels these performances with Guerra often taking a back seat, obsessively threading a couple of chords or a sly melody around Nidek's curiously restless playing.

The Green Blossoms is Guerra's duo with Aiko Koga, who plays ukulele and sighs in a beautifully unforced manner. The 11 studies gathered on *Stones And Ecstasy* – surely named in tribute to both My Bloody Valentine's *Ecstasy And Wine*, and Guerra's drink of choice, Stone's Green Ginger Wine – are unassuming things, revolving around gentle, deliberate phrases that drift away into infinity. "Slow Suck" (another MBV tribute, I suspect) is as drowsy and desolate as Codeine, with Koga's ukulele plucking acid drops from the ether, contrasting Guerra's chiming, brittle minor chords.

Vodka Sparrows has Guerra sparring with Mark Leacy, who is also a member of Australian free sound outfit Castings. Packaged with Black Petal's usual attention to detail – textured black paper held together with a blue shoelace – *Death A Thousand Times Over* is culled from recordings made in late 2005 in the Castings rehearsal space Yvonne Ruvé. These extended pieces move glacially, two guitars locked in an existential battle, weaving flurries of notes through icy reverb. Though Guerra and Leacy keep building the tension, there's no real sense of release. Everything hangs suspended. It's agonising in the best possible way.

JOE DALE

Scotty Hard
Radical Reconstructive Surgery
THIRSTY EAR BLUE SERIES CD

The electronic/jazz collaborations of Thirsty Ear's Blue Series can swing between the inspired and the inept, but they're rarely predictable. Although Beans and William Parker's disc was as stilted as if they'd been roused from sleep and forced to improvise at gunpoint, Spring Heel Jack's session *The Sweetness Of The Water* spanned a series of febrile electroacoustic improvisations, with the former drum 'n' bass duo tiptoeing across a tight, tense musical surface like a dragonfly on water. The latest in the series sees organist John Medeski and pianist Matthew Shipp chewing the voodoo down alongside occasional Wu Tang engineer Scotty Hard, and the session generates the kind of shadowboxing moves worthy of the Staten Island crew themselves.

The two keyboardists operate in tagteam formation. Medeski, known for his work with Rare Groove revivalists Medeski, Martin & Wood, supplies the heavy, lumbering chords, his oak tinged notes creaking and groaning on "Primary Humour" like the floorboards on Nosferatu's staircase. Meanwhile, Shipp lays down piano vamps that hang in the air like pollen seed, exploring boundless 12-tone terrain akin to Herbie Hancock's "The Egg".

"The Peeler" is the session's most perversely funky moment – Shipp jabs out his crabbiest, most Monk-like chords, William Parker fools around like he can't tell the kick from the snare, and the group stumble forward like a bunch of handcuffed convicts. Meanwhile, the rhythm section reaches critical mass on "The General" with beats as lazy and powerful as a grizzly bear, recalling the groggiest, foggiest productions of DJ Muggs. There's certainly no shortage of jazzy hiphop out there, but *Radical Reconstructive Surgery* is something quite different – dense yet fluid, the bubbling internal tensions of the group make the sound congeal and loom out of your speakers.

DEREK WALMSLEY

Infinite Livez Vs Stade
Art Brut Fe De Yoot
BIG DADA CD

Grime artist Wiley once dropped the tantalising aside that *"maybe it's the piss that I'm taking"*, but the British MC whose seriousness – and perhaps sanity – gives even greater cause for concern is Bethnal Green's Infinite Livez. His debut album *Bush Meat* (2004) stretched the bounds of credulity from all directions – he wavered between speech and song like a melancholy drunk, played with his food like a hyperactive kid (*"I custard creamed the semolina"*), and even blurred gender roles on the frankly disturbing "Tales Of Lactating Man". *Art Brut Fe De Yoot* is an unlikely face-off between Infinite and Swiss improvising electronic duo Stade, comprising Pierre Audetat and Christophe Calpini, who suggested the project at an Infinite Livez show in Europe.

The intro is an irresistibly filthy primordial soup, Infinite cussing that he's got to *"get to*

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fucking work" over primitivist electronics. Sadly, however, he never gets round to the job at hand. Whatever hiphop mythology might try and claim, proper freestyle rapping is invariably inferior to an MC who holds a few couplets at the ready, and Infinite is frequently caught empty-handed, spewing languorous psychobabble while Stade amble along well out of his way. "The Taste Of Jazz To Cum" sees him aimlessly riffing through whatever rhymes are easiest to hand, while a walking bassline meanders up the garden path.

It would be more fun simply to put Infinite on the mic on top of a populist selection of club bangers. By discarding hiphop's rulebook before they even get going, *Art Brut Fe De Yoot* loses the musical backdrop that formed a key part of *Bush Meat*'s clownish performances. For such a colourful MC, it's strange that this project should draw such a blank.

DEREK WALMSLEY

Jandek
Austin Sunday

CORWOOD INDUSTRIES 2×CD

Since Jandek ended his self-imposed, decades-long isolation with a Glasgow performance in October 2004, he's maintained a positively hectic gig schedule, from no public appearances in 25 years to 20 gigs in two. The first three, each in a trio with Richard Youngs and Alex Neilson, have all been released on CD. *Austin Sunday* was the fourth, recorded in Jandek's home state if not his hometown, with the pick-up group of Juan Garcia (bass), Nick Hennies (drums) and Chris Cogburn (drums).

Their accompaniment is more deferential than that of Youngs and Neilson. Consequently Jandek's guitar playing is softer and less spiky, his vocals calmer and his lyrics as archly sardonic as ever, are half-sung and half-recited in a voice that threatens to curl into a warble or a sneer at moments of import. The idiom, a loosely extemporised, detuned blues, is the same, though more melodic and less tempestuous, its momentum less haphazard.

Jandek's reclusiveness in the 1980s and 90s created an excess of context around his dozens of records, making them sound better than they actually are. Similarly, the processes of Jandek relocating his persona into a public forum, and of so definitively solo an artist attempting to recreate through a collaborative improvisation a music at once intensely private and overdocumented (the 49th Jandek album has just been released), are both more interesting than the resulting music.

Both processes are best observed live. After the fact, the music loses much of its impact. The group meander in and out of focus, drifting between passages of lucid interplay and of aimless and often tedious jamming, hinting sporadically at meaning and emotional resonance, but mostly sounding unconvinced they have anything of worth to communicate.

NICK CAIN

Jesu
Conqueror

HYDRA HEAD CD

Justin Broadrick was a founding member of Napalm Death, but it wasn't until Godflesh that his real vision emerged – mechanistic rhythms (which gradually became more and more groovelike until eventually he hired human drummers), grinding guitars and anguished vocals combined Killing Joke, Swans and Throbbing Gristle into something entirely new and occasionally psychedelic, most notably on *Selfless* and its companion EP *Merciless*.

Jesu, Broadrick's post-Godflesh project, maintains the dominant paradigm of his earlier work – big guitars, thumping rhythm (sometimes live, sometimes programmed), aching slowness. But the vocals are cleaner with less electronic filtering/damage and less Metallic riffs (owing more to Mogwai and My Bloody Valentine). *Conqueror*, their second album and fourth major release overall, is almost lush at times, specially on "Weightless & Horizontal" and "Medicine". He's still the guy walking around with a rain cloud permanently over his head, of course, but a lot of the lyrics here are about love and/or human interaction of a non-spiritual sort.

Ultimately, though, *Conqueror* is best understood as a series of riffs that you should let wash over your brain without spending too much time deciphering what Broadrick is on about. The guitars (and to a lesser degree the drums and synth drones) are the point of his music, as they always have been. Just lie back and let that oscillating wasp hum at the beginning of "Brighteyes" almost drive you crazy, before the huge riff comes crashing in like a bulldozer falling through your skylight.

PHIL FREEMAN

Mauricio Kagel
Quirinus' Liebeskuss

WINTER & WINTER CD

Some years ago, Mauricio Kagel suggested – with tongue prominently visible in his cheek – that the cracks appearing in the ivory tower of contemporary classical music were the result of a worldwide crackdown on elephant poaching. In fact, no one has contributed more, or more passionately, to the reaction away from music for other composers than Kagel himself. Growing up in Argentina, where there was no powerful cultural hegemony at work, and spending his adult life in Germany, where post-war openness to other cultural inputs was immediately evident, has turned him into a composer of genuinely international standing – as accessible as he is demanding.

There are three pieces here. The earliest is a 1994–95 *Serenade* (for flutes, guitar/mandolin/banjo/ukulele and percussion), which sets out to examine what a serenade might actually be. It's neither sentimental nor debunking, but brisk, fresh and amorous, a sharp sorbet to be taken between the two other pieces.

The *Double Sextet* (2000–01) which closes the album is straightforwardly experimental in that it attempts to generate its own form from the very basic materials laid out at the beginning. Six woodwinds and six strings, but none of the intermediary instruments – clarinets and violas – which normally hold the centre of the harmonic picture. Its metrical profile is also very strictly constrained, remaining in 2/4 or 3/8 throughout. Kagel connects it closely to the longest piece here, *Dunnus Liebeskuss* for vocal ensemble and instruments, which is based on a text by the 17th century millenarian Quirinus Kuhlmann, who is strongly connected in Kagel's mind with his beloved Hölderlin. Using the same metres as the *Double Sextet*, the score is a parad down contention between vocalists and ensemble, drawing on Kuhlmann's spasmodic religiosity and metaphysical collision of ideas.

As an insight into Kagel's still evolving art, these three substantial, individually stunning pieces are near perfect.

BRIAN MORTON

Basil Kirchin
Particles

TRUNK CD

Fired up by his own highly individual musical vision till the end, composer Basil Kirchin succumbed to cancer in the summer of 2005. *Particles* represents his final recordings, and is largely given over to what Kirchin christened "The Atonals", an attempt to translate everyday conversation into musical phrases. Originally a big band drummer in 1940s London, Kirchin spent the 1960s and 70s composing edgy soundtracks for British films, including the Vincent Price vehicle *The Abominable Dr Phibes*. He also wrote library music (acclaimed as an influence by Broadcast) and released two LPs titled *Worlds Within Worlds*, on which autistic children's voices and sounds from London Zoo were mixed with improvisations from Derek Bailey and Evan Parker.

Particles kicks off with *Bye Bye 1941*, a bouncing jazz band number with goofy melody and squelchy trumpet solos. It's harmonically straightforward, uptempo and irrepressibly good-humoured. Strangely these qualities persist through the entire album, though subsequent tracks are far more experimental. *Concept Suite: Secret Conversations Between Instruments* is the first of several fast, chattering pieces, where covertly taped speech has been painstakingly reworked, via software, into live music. If these jabbering lines for trombone and bass clarinet were actually transcribed, they must have been sheer hell to read, but the effect is bustling angst free improv, with the instruments coalescing into unison phrases now and then. On *We Don't Care* and *Rise And Revolt*, electronic instruments – possibly a wind synth? – join the nattering, and Chris Karan's drums boost the tension.

While Kirchin's pursuit of his chamber chinwag project recalls Olivier Messiaen's transcriptions of birdsong, the relentless pace and inconsequential feel left me cold. Far more interesting is *Amundo*, a two minute double bass solo played by Kirchin himself. The akadaddling pizzicato is somehow treated so that it acquires a wayward Indian or Korean tinge. Kirchin, who spent time in India in the 1950s, still had a surprise or two up his sleeve.

CLIVE BELL

Steve Lacy
At The New Jazz Meeting Baden-Baden 2002

HATOLOGY CD

Steve Lacy loathed the idea of jazz as repertory music. If it wasn't moving forward, breaking through some membrane of expectation, then it was mere recreation and from there only a small step to what he dismissed as "recreational music". Two years before his death in 2004, he performed at the Sudwest Rundfunk studio in Baden-Baden with bassist Peter Herbert, drummer Wolfgang Reisinger and Austrian composer Bernhard Lang. The aim of the New Jazz Meeting was not so much to 'bring together' the worlds of improvisation

and composition which is a bland marketing concept, but to allow the philosophies of each to interpenetrate.

The basic material was supplied by Lang whose composition *dw 1.2* part of the *Differenz/Wiederholung* series (Gilles Deleuze ahoy!), was originally written for flute, saxophone and piano. Also invited to Baden-Baden were turntablist Philip Jeck and electronic composer Christof Kurzmann, both of whom had been given access to Lang's composition and created samples from it. These were then remixed live with the group's performance, adding a new discourse drawn from electronica to what was already for Lacy a challenging new situation.

That he took the challenge with unswerving seriousness can be judged from his decision to rehearse rather than attend the funeral of old friend and collaborator Mal Waldron – seeding the musical future judged to be more important than burying the dead. There is a remarkable concentration to Lacy's articulation and phrasing here, nowhere more than on the long "Remix 10.2" with Kurzmann. This is one of the pieces left over from the earlier hatDLDGY set *Trio x 3*. When Lacy himself died, Werner X Uehlinger revisited the material and decided its richness demanded a further issue. A couple of tracks were on the first set, but they grow here in the presence of new material.

BRIAN MORTON

LCD Soundsystem
Sound Of Silver
EMI/DFA CD

The lyric to the title track of LCD Soundsystem's latest album is more of a mantra: *"The sound of silver/Makes you want to be a teenager/Until you remember the feelings of a real life emotional teenager/Then you think again."* As with so much of *Sound Of Silver*, it's a hyper vigilant, hyper technoactive reflection on the passing of pop time, on the there and the then in the context of the here and the now. Its beatscape and outlook aren't that dissimilar to LCD's self-titled 2005 debut. Here, you'll find another jumble of echoes of Kraftwerk and The Fall of Can and "Funkytown". Again, it's an album that speeds across long distances at high tempos, caught in a high anxiety of riffs and loops, refusing to lapse into the shuteye illusion of bliss. Again, it's a homage to better, more intelligent pop times, when New York set the tone, when disco could be as intelligent and serious as your life and the sharpest operators were just beginning to make their own private connections between Steve Reich, The Fall, Earth, Wind & Fire and Suicide, to name but four. They were better times because they were worse, more desperate times – of recession, global unease, teen angst (though not for LCD frontman James Murphy, who was only 11 in 1981 and just an infant when Bowie another strong influence here, was at his zenith), edgier times which produced edgier music. Again, Murphy shows a wicked ear for pastiche but emerges with something arguably stronger than his source material, benefiting from 21st century hindsight and superior technology. *Sound Of Silver* is quite simply stronger and better, an advance on its formidable predecessor.

Opener "Get Innocuous" kicks in with a wittily deceptive intro, a retread of the stuttering Casio beat of "Losing My Edge" with droopily forlorn disco strobe synths suggesting that we're in for a diminished return to the first album. But new elements enter the fray, not least of which is a straight lift from Kraftwerk's "Robots". Yet far from feeling passily referential, "Get Innocuous" provokes a feeling that this assemblage heralds the start of something good, that Murphy has mastered his armoury and is at the top of his game.

"Time To Get Away" sees him contrive his vocals with unnatural petulant yelps and inflections à la James Chance. "North American Scum", borne on a Suicide tide of fuzz and drum machine, is a self deprecatingly defensive lyric reflecting the parish status of Bush era Americans. "Someone Great" epitomises Murphy's ability to create sounds that don't just replicate (in this case, The Human League) but manage to recreate the tangy sense of shock you first felt when you heard these synthpop coinages minted. Only with the final track, "New York I Love You But You're Bringing Me Down", a highly ambivalent hymn of praise to Manhattan, do things slacken to walking pace.

Once again, LCD have created a facsimile of a bygone pop ideal and, Pygmalion-like, invested it with a life of its own. To a pop generation who, having never had it so good, have barely produced anything any good, this is the best thing they're likely to hear this year.

DAVID STUBBS

Gyorgy Ligeti
Clear Or Cloudy
DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 4xCD

György Ligeti lived long enough to oversee three recorded cycles of his work. Early pioneering recordings by First Wave modernist sympathisers like conductor Ernst Bour were released by Wergo on a set of famously boomy and hissy LPs. In the last decade of his life the composer supervised a complete Ligeti Edition that, as financial realities bit, was shared between Sony and Warner Classics. And in between he was associated with leading classical label Deutsche Grammophon, who now issue this four CD anthology culled from their complete Ligeti recordings to commemorate his death in June 2006.

The Sony/Warners complete edition came with Ligeti's seal of approval and DG must have been hopping mad that its own efforts had been superseded. In fact there's much to relish here, and if you're after a reasonably priced and comprehensive survey then there's no better place to start. Ligeti's 1960s nonsense music-theatre pieces, *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures*, are notoriously difficult to project on CD. Impetus and slapstick humour flows from the live stage action, but Pierre Boulez's 1981 version nails the notes with discernible clarity, leaving singers Jane Manning, Mary Thomas and William Pearson to dig into Ligeti's sense of heightened mania. Boulez is again on hand for *Ramifications* (1968–69), a taut and supple exploration of microtonal string textures, and once more the refinement of his ear creates a blueprint.

At the core of Ligeti's development was a series of orchestral works, each instalment marking the opening of a new phase. For the first and last of these pieces – *Apparitions* (1958–59) and the punk-lyesian *San Francisco Polyphony* (1974) – the Warners complete edition is where to go, but DG trace the trajectory through *Atmosphères* (1961), *Lontano* (1967) and *Melodien* (1971). The first two are performed by The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Claudio Abbado, and if this seems an unlikely pairing with Ligeti then the sheer beauty of The VPO's string sound and internal balance adds its own magic. Jonathan Nott's notably darker and more detailed versions with The Berlin Philharmonic on Warners have, however, become definitive.

Atmosphères to *Melodien* is essentially a journey from white-noise texture to a rediscovery of line and counterpoint, and DG's ordering of pieces captures the remarkable momentum with which Ligeti's ideas evolved. Disc one begins with a frankly not very interesting *Cello Sonata* (1948–53) inspired by Bartók, but a *String Quartet No 1* completed shortly afterwards urgently grasps at the jittery constructs and curt melodic phraseology of his mature style. *String Quartet No 2* (1968) is, of course, a masterwork. Its exploration of the further reaches of string harmonics collides with plucked mechanics to redefine the sound of the string quartet. Here it's played by The LaSalle Quartet, who premiered the work, and their neat approach is in contrast to later "knowing" versions, where each gesture gets exaggerated and overboiled. The fourth disc climaxes with the *Violin* and *Piano Concertos*, late Ligeti expertly played, good also to rehear rarer items like the underrated *Double Concerto For Flute And Oboe* (1972) and Ligeti's solo organ piece *Volumina* – bloodcurdling sounds, not for the faint hearted.

PHILIP CLARK

Lil Scrappy
Bred 2 Die, Born 2 Live
REPRISE CD

If Atlanta's TI went majestic for King, and Young Jeezy played it confessional for his Inspiration, Lil Scrappy just seems happy to have a record deal. As far as first track, first lines go, "*Click clack, the prince is back/Even though I been here I still owe y all that/A nigga been low key, but I'm off the rack/Jumped off the corner, sold weed, now I'm back to crack*," is none too glorious. But maybe that's why *Bred 2 Die* works so well. There's something endearing about how Scrappy feels like he owes everyone an explanation as to his whereabouts since 2004's *The King Of Crunk & BME Recordings Present: Welcome To Trillville*, something puritanically all-business to how happily he bluntly recounts the most banal of hustler details: "*I had to get some new bullets and some even bigger guns*." Even the song titles have that: it is what it is, ethos to them – the topics of "I'm Back", "Livin' In The Projects", "Pussy Poppin'", "Posted In The Club" and "Police" are exactly as advertised.

Elsewhere, Scrappy provides undistracting lyrics to a variety of fantastic beats, executive produced by 50 Cent and Lil Jon. "Money In The Bank" fronts this insistent EKG like synth hook, with water slurps and keychain bombdrops comprising the track's peripheral paranoia, piano distorted guitar and what sounds like 100 other instruments go up and down minor scale notes in unison for prime crunk cut "Gangsta, Gangsta". 50 himself lends his falsetto for the hook on "Nigga, What's Up", a funky West Coast headnodder. Best is "Baby

melo045

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4/5 - Independent On Sunday

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Drowned In Sound

new album out now

melo049

Windmill
Puddle City Racing Lights

'Freakoid Americana that sounds like a lost Mercury Rev or Grandaddy album. Not bad for a one-man band from Newport Pagnell.' NME

'Dillon might be a great British eccentric in the making' Uncut

Debut album from Matthew Dillon aka Windmill released March 2007

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Machinefabriek *Flotter* MACHINEFABRIEK 3" CD
Final instalment in a series released over the last year by Dutch sound artist Rutger Zuydervelt, who records under the Machinefabriek moniker. *Flotter* is beautifully paced, beginning with drones that evolve into vistas of universal expansion in slow, carefully selected steps. There is a constant backdrop of crackling LP surface noise, as one prepares to grapple with the cosmic issues and tones that lurk just outside each of our bedroom's windows. Really a fine piece.

Dsic *minOsic* LF 3" CD Bristol's dsic are masters of a kind of low-attention-span free electronic noise. Their debut release is a gurgling pastiche of sliced wallpaper, interspersed with damaged concrete and various sounds of small disasters, all tossed into a blender and served at room temperature. When you think things ll change fast, they're slow and vice versa. Which makes for a pretty swell dick in the old anticipation socket.

Fat Day/P Shaw *Oskarrensaga* 100% BREAKFAST 7" Easily the most insane release this month is the collaboration between musicians Fat Day and visual artist P Shaw. *Oskarrensaga* is a nutty Viking creation myth pairing Shaw's narration and visuals with Fat Day's homegrown electro-hogwash to brilliant effect. The sleeve unfolds into a jumbo poster/comic strip, with an insert explaining the characters and story (in case you're kinda slow). It'll have you singing "Yo Heave Ho" in no time.

Gareth Hardwick *Aurora* LOW POINT 3" CD The Nottingham guitarist's work is very much in the Skyaw tradition. On *Aurora*, his fourth release, Hardwick urges and delays sheets of amplified tone to the most gently shimmering destinations imaginable. He calls it Ambient, but I feel as if it has a bit more meat than that limp term implies.

Robert Horton *Winter Suite 2004* NEW AMERICAN FOLK HERO 3" CD Robert 'Rocket' Horton is a West Coast guitarist whose work I've followed since the early 90s, when he first collaborated with Mike Shannon. His work has been all over the map in the intervening years, with some particular highpoints having been recently achieved in duo with Chorelimbides' Tom Carter. That said, *Winter Suite 2004* is a solo disc, recorded with a variety of stringed and electronic instruments. The sounds range from squeedled (but recognisable) acoustic guitar forays to pieces for bowed guitar that sound as though they could be purely electronic. But Horton's approach is always interesting and intelligent; just not always straightforward.

Keenan Lawler *The Strange Tale Of Eddy Westport* NEW AMERICAN FOLK HERO 3" CD Lawler hails from Louisville, Kentucky and first achieved notice as a member of the Pelt splinter group Keyhole, whose two LPs on Eclipse are highly recommended. His new solo disc brims with exotic inventions for the hollow body steel guitar. At times, Lawler recalls the woozy scramble of late period Fahey or even the acoustic work of Donald Miller, but his playing has a unique, circular feel and a conscious roughness that sets it apart from its peers. Small fingerpicked bluegrass figures emerge from the brush at certain points, but they represent a version of roots music that is ultimately as alien and avant garde as anything you've ever heard.

Machinefabriek

Number None *nervous climates* NEW AMERICAN FOLK HERO 3" CD Number None are Chicago duo Christopher Miller and Jeremy Bushnell, whose highly elastic drones were most recently heard on a great Gold Soundz cassette. The music is broken into smaller bits than those which the pair usually create, but they still manage to conjure a beautiful shifting tableau of guitars, pedals and maybe synths. Unlike more static practitioners of the craft, these guys infuse their drones with a lotta motion, so they reward active listening a lot more easily than many of their similarly styled contemporaries.

D/Moon *moonOphonique part one* BURNING EMPTINESS 3" CD Interesting split by a couple of seemingly French groups. D and Moon (both of whom are solo for this project) *MoonOphonique* starts with D's acoustic guitar plus plasma rattle, then surges into Moon's synthesizer based Magma kuck. On the surface, it doesn't seem like the combination would make much sense, but the parts both glisten like well oiled bodies sliding across each other's contours.

Stuckomater *Beta Carotene* LOW POINT 3" CD Manchester's Stuckomater use a basic rock quartet line-up to craft a rather feverish free rock vocabulary. *Beta Carotene* is a straight to cassette documentation of some live material, and it is a very lovely and glowing gush of amped noise and gristle. Comparable perhaps to Sunburned in their most maniacally focused small combo format, crossed with Vampire Belt at their rancid best. This will put a smile on the mug of many a soggy gob.

Mike Tembouro *Boyfinger* NEW AMERICAN FOLK HERO 2x3" CD **Mike Tembouro & Matt McDowell** *God Will Fail John's Horn* NEW AMERICAN FOLK HERO 3" CD Curious set from Pittsburgh's Tembouro (of Maisha and Arco Flute Foundation fame), combining one disc of Mike playing a 20 foot long mandolin type instrument, with another disc that features Wilson Lee remixing and playing along with the original one. Tembouro's instrument has the resonance of a room-sized coiled spring (what the hell did it *look* like?) and his playing is more of a percussive nature than anything else. Still, it is a heck of a weird noise generator, no doubt about that! Lee's reimaginations of the material are busier, but subtly so, layering the extant gabble with variations and gunk that add a Bertoiac density without being too distracting. It's a nice collaboration. Tembouro has also released a 2001 session he did with fellow Arco Flute member Matt McDowell – a blend of electronics and disassembled pianos. Droney events get piled up like so much hay, then the barn bursts into flames. Look out, mister!

Tone Ghosting *Wig Fleet* PANIC RESEARCH AUDIO 3" CD Solo project of DC's Jeff Bagato, the sounds are based on destroyed and decayed LPs, which are looped and otherwise manipulated until the source becomes as abstract as a starry night. *Wig Fleet* is four tracks, remixed from somewhere, that are jumbles of moist sounding noise, overlaid with random beat action and effects. It's good, weird homemadeness.

UM *Bumskipper Eight* UR BUSINESS 3" CD Cambridge's prolific UM is up to eight *Bumskippers*, which represent but a mere a drop in UM's overflowing bucket. The mode here is electronic singer songwriter, whatsis the mood is casual and the sounds are pretty random – from squiggles to plonks to semi-juicy gossip, this wears many hats.

Veer Right Young Pastor *Don't Touch Me I Am The Ghost Of Magnetism* VEER RIGHT 7" VRYP are a young quartet from Long Beach, California with an intense and splendid approach to waffle dynamics. "Don't Touch Me" tosses Buckley/Plant vocalese into slow stressed out drones created with a variety of instruments (stringed and unstrung) that tend to devolve into brilliant repeating figures. Some of the guitar feel reminds me of the great Dreams Of Tall Buildings, but the vocals take this into real unexplored areas. BYRON COLEY

Mit Nye Band *Fluid Druid* ESCHO 10" Mit Nye Band (My New Band) are a septet from Copenhagen, Denmark with connections to other underground cells like Øireforsøg. The group recorded *Fluid Druid* on a 2005 American tour. It's a bit of a mixed bag, while Mit Nye Band keep a groove going in a vaguely post Can style, complete with babbling Damo Suzuki-style vocals, neither side of the 10" achieves lift off. Abstruse post-production, squeaking electronics and abuse of the delay pedal all conspire to obscure Mit Nye Band's positive attributes – a good drummer and some endearingly melodic, tangled guitar.

Nest/Mhfs *Nest/Mhfs* GEST 3" CD R **Un Ciego** *Vincennes Monument/Kali Gendaki* A BINARY OATUR 7" A huge, forthright rumble emerges from this collaboration between New Zealand's Nest, a duo of Nigel Wright on laptop and Andrew Scott on guitar, and Mhfs, aka Mark Sadgrove. Drawing from and updating the overloaded guitar psychedelia of Fennesz and My Bloody Valentine, Nest/Mhfs scrape away the melody and wallow gloriously in the sheer excess of engorged, erotic textural whiteout. Scott also records and performs as Un Ciego. "Vincennes Monument" swamps lo fi melodic piano with a gorgeously grating wall of noise, as though the instrument somehow was stuck in the warpath of a combine harvester. "Kali Gendaki" documents the aftermath: a collection of dirtied noises skirting around a junkyard trap.

Pan Dolphinic Dawn *I/II* BENNIFER EDITIONS 7" Pan Dolphinic Dawn is one of the many solo aliases of James Ferraro of The Skaters, an artist who has underground branding nous on lockdown: this new nom de disque almost tops his recent project Composition Of The Sensibilities Of Melted Knowledge. The distinctions between most of Ferraro's solo outings can be hard to map, but for what it's worth, this single is one of his murkier celestial roads to no mind: a groaning wall of voice, drone and creaking distortion. The deep-throat chant that binds *I/II* unexpectedly reminds me of Popol Vuh's *Sei Still, Weiss Ich Bin*. The ghost of Florian Fricke must be haunting Ferraro's third eye.

People Like Us & Ergo Phizmiz *Honeysuckle Boulevard* NO LABEL 10" This first collaboration between post plunderphonics artists People Like Us and Ergo Phizmiz was only available if you emailed the artists for a voucher and then subsequently picked up your free copy from one of ten designated record stores or art galleries. Handing out free records is as good a way to go as any, and you would hope the context might reinvigorate the actual content. Alas, not so – *Honeysuckle Boulevard* is a playful stroll through the back alleys of early 20th century popular music, cha cha, fairground tunes and so on, subjected to not-so-subtle electronic tweaking. I love the general idea – the disinterment and making-uncanny of nostalgic, borderline kitsch materials – but as a repeat listening experience, it sure looked great on paper.

Teming Power *Six Pieces* EARLY MORNING 10" Norway's Aakild Haugland, who *is* Teming Power, has been working away in near isolation for almost two decades, releasing obsessively sculpted pieces of modern Isolationism to a miniscule audience – *Six Pieces* is released in a hard-to-find micro-edition of 110 copies. If it's a vanity project, it's curiously self-effacing, as Haugland's late-night laments, scored for voice, tape, guitar, keyboards and assorted percussion and bells, tend to evacuate the composer from the scene. As with other Teming Power releases I've encountered, this is highly refined music, with Haugland pursuing an almost fanatical vision for sound construction. JOHN DALE

Daddy", which samples Curtis Mayfield's "Just Be True" in service of an unfaithful Screppy begging for a second chance. *"Sure I gave her a little dick, but I gave all my love to you"* he says. Here's hoping it all works out.
NICK SYLVESTER

Pierre-Yves Macé
Crash_Test II
ORKHÊSTRA INTERNATIONAL CD

French composer Pierre-Yves Macé's 2002 Tzadik release *Faux-Jumeaux* felt like the discovery of a major new talent with a highly primed ear for electronically manipulated instrumental texture. Perhaps this new project of pieces for string quartet with electronics suffers from heightened expectations created by the success of that earlier CD. Certainly Macé's ear for the string quartet feels prone to blundering into clichés of avant garde sound production. Visceral red-blooded bowings recall Xenakis, while one moment squeaks quite literally like a gate.

The music was originally conceived with the spatial dimensions of particular performance venues in mind, and into that heady brew Macé adds chance procedures. The string quartet players toss coins to trigger pre-recorded material on tape and a thick, heavily braided soundscape emerges. The problem though, is one of idiom. The effects Macé creates sound like an Arditti Quartet puree, with the occasional amplified screeching down-bow straying into generalised Kronos Quartet territory. When a more personal voice surfaces, it's a relief. A lavishly tonal harmonic pattern materialises that's obsessed over, and the final passage breaks down narrative syntax into a stuttering catalogue of gestural non sequiturs that are brutally cut off. Not Macé's finest moment, but I'm going to keep listening.
PHILIP CLARK

Mirror/Dash
I Can't Be Bought
THREE LOBED CD

Thurston Moore
Flipped Out Bride
BLOSSOMING NOISE CD

Mirror/Dash's first release, the 1992 7" *Electric Pen/Gum* was a blast of homemade duo invention suggesting a potent future. But in the ensuing decade and a half, this side project of Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore and Kim Gordon has been mostly dormant, producing only a 2003 split with artist Dan Graham and a handful of live shows. *Can't Be Bought*, a set recorded in May of 2005 at Scotland's Le Weekend festival, continues that sleepy streak, offering 37 minutes of mellow improv with barely enough activity to keep anyone's interest.

There's surely some worthwhile sound here. Moore's guitar noodles often spark small flames, and early on Gordon's breathy moans fold nicely into his rolling atmospheres. But even during the set's busiest moments, little tension emerges. Washing din and dark tones freeze limply in the air, rarely moving forward or delivering any surprises. Things even get painful when, 30 minutes in, Gordon yelps an awkward *"Shake! Shake It!"* over Moore's bored crashes. But that valley is quickly redeemed by the record's peak – a final three minutes of noisy loops and strident howls that suggest how much better the whole of *I Can't Be Bought* could have been.

A similar dichotomy shows up on Moore's latest solo guitar record. The opening title cut on the two track *Flipped Out Bride* is 16 minutes of rather uneventful drone. His refusal to vary his tone beyond a slow ripple or a mild change in volume has a Zen-like purity, but the overall effect is comfortable tedium. Track two "O Sweet Lanolin", is a different story. 12 minutes of metallic clangs, cavernous feedback and jangling chords piled high. As Moore's dark overtones multiply, the piece recalls classic Sonic Youth horror shows like "Flower" and *Sonic Death*. In fact, "O Sweet Lanolin" comes off as a scrapbook sampler of Moore's innovative guitar career, a nice reminder of the many moods he can still conjure with six simple strings.
MARC MASTERS

Mouthus
For The Great Slave Lakes
THREE LOBED CD

Follow This House
IMPORTANT CD

Eskimo King
Tooth-Shaped Migration
OUR MOUTH CD

Brooklyn duo Mouthus turn to Metal on *For The Great Slave Lakes* – not in the sense of the musical genre, but in the sense of a clanging chrome-plated machine. All seven tracks bear the thrust of an overdriven engine with no off switch. Like hamsters in a wheel, guitarist Brian Sullivan and drummer Nate Nelson deftly create endless loops of muscular noise.

The result is the closest the duo have come to replicating its athletic live show on record. The ping-pong percussion and bleating feedback on "When We Were Graves" emits nightclub smoke, while the crashing "The Harbors Taken" sees Sullivan moaning in tune with his shredded guitar. On the 42 minute album closer "Compound My Eyes", Mouthus run a marathon, peeling off reams of howling noise and shimmering beats. A few plateaux of melody and reflection emerge, but the most of it, like the rest of this bracing album, is devoted to a single, powerful idea.

The newer *Follow This House* is even more minimal. On recent records, Mouthus have proven adept at mining their established sound for tangents without losing their core sonic personality. Here we get heavy, monolithic noise that's easily the least rhythmic, least song like material they have yet released. Yet each moment remains unmistakably Mouthus.

On "Camera", a whirring tone is fused to random erratic clunks, like a tethered boat knocking endlessly against a dock. "Lake" adds a high drone to bombing percussion while "Half Thaw" offers low feedback that hangs the air like a poison cloud. *Follow This House* is the most challenging Mouthus album so far. At times it seems to dare the listener to lose interest. But keep your eyes and ears open long enough and you may find its claustrophobic concoctions enveloping.

Eskimo King is Sullivan's solo project, and *Tooth-Shaped Migration* is his first release on his group's own Our Mouth imprint. His sound is closest to Mouthus circa 2005's *Slow Globes*: rumbling noise coloured with acoustic strums, distant vocals and distorted beats. Portions offer lo-fi half-tunes akin to early Sebadoh or Luxurious Bags, in other places like the shifting "Pinewood Derby", they sound like multiple songs passing each other at an intersection. Neil Young-ish clipped guitar, Jandekian off-key plucks and Beefheart-like stumbles emerge, but mostly *Tooth-Shaped Migration* is its own burbling beast, standing solidly next to Mouthus's best work.
MARC MASTERS

Günter Müller
Live And Replayed
ESQUILO 2xCD-R

Among the recent associates of Swiss percussionist and electronic musician Günter Müller are Keith Rowe, Toshimaru Nakamura and Taku Sugimoto. Although he's a less single-minded operator than any of these sonic purists, such names help indicate where the priorities of Müller's music currently lie: texture and the live sculpting of sound. In two decades of activity as an electroacoustic improvisor, Müller has been a serial collaborator, working with a huge range of improvisors. So this rare solo release, a double CD-R on adventurous Portuguese label Esquilo, will be grabbed eagerly by admirers of his work.

The first disc contains excerpts from live performances in Sydney, Paris and Kyoto: the second improvisations using processed material from the original recordings. The Kyoto track is the most compelling of the live tracks: a cauldron of bubbling clicks and low register burbles that mutates suddenly into a thick soup of electronic sighs and groans. The CD-R of parasitic, as live versions causes a series of restless moodscapes to pass through the listener's ears. There are surprising jolts and some uncomfortable lo-fi sounds. (A pair of iPods are among Müller's core performance tools.) Though there are many ear-catching sequences, it has to be asked to what extent spontaneity in the studio really matters with such material – at least to the listener. Müller is obviously deeply committed to improvisation as a practice, but it might have been more rewarding to hear a slower, more composed approach to ordering the source sounds. What's sacrificed – the potential for structure and clarity to match the diversity of the material on offer – is missed.
WILL MONTGOMERY

Brendan Murray
Wonders Never Cease
INTRANSITIVE CD

This long-awaited sequel to Brendan Murray's *Resting Places* assembled over the past four years from recordings of live concerts in and around his home town of Boston, could be a fascinating example of Marshall McLuhan's famous distinction between 'hot' and 'cool' media. "A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in high definition," he wrote in *Understanding Media*. Hot media "do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience" and are therefore "low in participation", whereas cool media are "high in participation or completion by the audience". The idea of definition is crucial. Murray, like Jason Lescalleet, creates music of considerable structural and textural finesse from basic, even primitive equipment – cheap samplers, effects pedals, four track, amplified junk and guitars – concentrating on what he calls "mid-fi", a rich combination of pristine drones and scuzzy noise. The music is at one and the same time precisely calibrated – fussed over almost worried into shape ("Hymn One", "Seas") – and yet undeniably raw ("Hymn Two"). The longer tracks work best – "Seas" takes the listener from a draughty attic full of wheezy squeezeboxes into an ocean of glistening drones, and ends up back on the street busking forlorn violin. And you don't realise how you got there, no matter how much participation or completion you put in. After all, when it comes to music, 'hot' and 'cool' are both pretty positive as adjectives go. Murray's live gigs must have been red hot; the album he's crafted from them is dead cool.
IAN WANBURTON

Nine Horses
Money For All
SAMADHISOUND CD

Money For All is a half-and-half kind of release too long for an EP, too short for an album, some new tracks and some old ones, rubbed a little by remix to come up shinier (in theory). But there's something that nags about the sound, too. Nine Horses are David Sylvian with his brother Steve Jansen and Burnt Friedman collaborating via email, here, as on their 2008 album *Snow Borne Sorrow*, things feel flawed by the distances encoded in file sharing.

There's also a shifting, shiftless sense of genre that Sylvian's voice (musically, lyrically and aesthetically) can't always bring together into a coherent whole. "Money For All", one of the two new tracks, is typical: a cosmopolitan Robot-Wants kind of avant blues. Sylvian gets twitchy about air travel and geopolitics (*"Wipe your nation's shame from you/It's not where you're born/It's the things that you do"*). He could also be thinking about the magpie sonics. The remixes, similarly, are collages of virtual instruments that add up to less than the sum of their parts. "The Banality Of Evil (Burnt Friedman Remix)" tones down the brighter colours of the original with fairly banal results.

Sylvian takes his processes seriously, acting as his own engineer and producer in order to communicate more immediately with the listener. But considering the detachment of this material and the way file sharing makes human interaction unnecessary, you also wonder if there's a kind of musical sgoraphobia at work.
SAM DAVIES

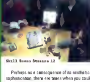
Organum
Amen
DIE STADT CD

In the past decade, the bulk of David Jackman's releases, both solo and as Organum, have been reissues. The first release in a planned trilogy, 2005's *Sanctus* was only the second album of new Organum material in 11 years. A marked departure from his signature sound – grinding layers of rotor and bowed drone, or, less frequently improvisations on wind instruments and metallic objects recorded en plein air – its four interchangeable 11 minute tracks overlaid slowly fluctuating pipe organ drones with portentous bell chimes and gong strikes.

On *Amen*, the second installment, two interchangeable 20 minute tracks take *Sanctus*'s template and make it even more pompous and overbearing by peppering it with samples of choral singing of the word *"Amen"*. But even if neither album is a memorable or significant addition to the Organum catalogue, both at least attempt to broaden the rubric. In

The Compiler Various artists: reviewed, rated, reviled

Remove Celebrity Centre JUNIOR ASPIRIN CD *Remove Celebrity Centre* provides forceful evidence of robust, original and infectiously enjoyable music being made within or on the edges of the visual arts. Contributors include artist Sue Tompkins (formerly of Life Without Buildings), Huysmans interpreter Emily Wardill (represented here by the wonderfully titled "A Lake Of Blood (Preyed Upon By Evil Angels)", film maker and writer Dan Fox (co founder of the brilliantly named Skill Seven Stamina 12) and Tate Triennial represented artist Mark Leckey (in his group Jack To Jack). The cover artwork is by David Noonan (whose work is now in the Saatchi Gallery): three black and white images that have the appearance of photomontages, describing urban scenes (one of Leicester Square, another of Piccadilly Circus) are at once surreal, giving a dizzying sense of time travel (do they depict 2020 or 1976?) and are keen edged with ambiguous portent. These are precisely the same qualities shared by much of the music on this compilation: the collective sensibility is gleefully enquiring, determinedly individualistic yet commonly open to the awareness and creative virtues of quotation. There is also humour at work within the Junior Aspirin scene, excursions into cartoon-like playfulness, faintly dada in spirit with a subtly sinister hue.


Skill Seven Stamina 12

Perhaps as a consequence of its aesthetic sophistication, there are times when you could be listening to a perfectly recreated outtake from a punk sampler of the late 70s. Charlottefield's gloriously brattish cover of The Beatles' "Glass Onion", for example, might have been recorded in a room above a pub in 1977. At others – during Extra Action Marching Band's "Durge", for example – the ghost of Test Department never seems too distant. Skill Seven Stamina 12, by contrast, operate in a compelling territory whose foundations lie with Young Marble Giants and The Raincoats – a near perfect update of the post punk style once defined by Jon Savage as "angular asymmetrical and herky-jerky". Above all there is something pleasingly unhinged about this selection of vastly differing but mutually sympathetic tracks. Their collective chemistry creates a single, distinctive mood – alluringly positioned between old-fashioned rough edges and modern eccentricity. Definitely worth seeking out. MICHAEL BRACEWELL

I, Mute Hummings EX OVO CD Workmanlike Ambient compilation from a new label set up by Tobias Schmidt and Mirko Uhlig, each of whom contributes a remix to the nine track collection. Mostly steering clear of New Age slop (though not always – step forward ex-Tangerine Dream flautist Steve Jolliffe) it's rewarding for the variety of approaches it showcases. There are some fine digital landscapes from Keith Berry, Dronaement and Paul Bradley (the latter an occasional member of Colin Potter & Darren Tate's Monos). There's also some pleasant, if somewhat underwhelming instrumental work from Belgian guitar/analogue effects exponent Dirk Serries (operating as Fear Falls Burning, a singularly inappropriate moniker for such pastoral sounding music), along with Jeffrey Roden, who uses only bass guitar to produce his wide palette of lush, accessible sounds – just don't call him The Fish. At the other extreme, Berlin duo Column One's piece for massed scraped string glissandi makes for decidedly uneasy listening. Real fingernails down the blackboard stuff, but very well executed.

There's strong work, too, from Troum, who have been active in one form or another for almost 20 years now, and whose contribution evinces their deft and imaginative control over their resources. Based on organic but unidentifiable sounds, it achieves a plateau of mantra-like calm but never lapses into stasis. Finally, Moog pioneer Richard Lainhart contributes a remixed excerpt from his gorgeous 1974 drone piece "White Nights", which manages to suggest both Tony Conrad's violin overtone marathons and the tape loop section from "Close To The Edge". I know that's the second Yes reference in this review but it really does. KEITH MOLINÉ

How Low Can You Go. Anthology Of The String Bass 1925–1941 DUST TO DIGITAL 3xCD+BOOK "Twixt the jazz backbeat and the power riff, the string bass was the connecting tissue of that flex muscle pulse that begat rock 'n' roll." Here's a tribute to those journeymen with bruised and bloodied fingers who plucked, slapped and bowed their way from obscurity to more obscurity. For every Jimmy Blanton, Pops Foster and Wellman Braud, there are a dozen string bass and cello men often not considered important enough even to be named in the label's ledgers.

By the mid-1920s the upright bass, 'bull fiddle' or 'doghouse', was replacing the tuba in orchestras and groups. Interestingly, having introduced the powerfully projecting John Lindsay on his first two Red Hot Peppers dates, jazz's other 'inventor' Jelly Roll Morton went back to brass bass. A generation later, the acoustic instrument was having to stave off the challenge of Leo Fender's electric instrument; even the diehards learned to make do with the dreaded Ol', thus sparing themselves the need to learn how to slap and pull like crossbowmen just to be heard.

Volumes one and two here are devoted to a chronological survey of the bass's role in jazz, Country blues, bluegrass, Hawaiian music and assorted novelty forms. Sometimes it's hard to see why the bass is considered to be featured or even important, even in these immaculate transfers (dust-to-digital gold in most cases) but the very anonymity of the role is producer Dick Spottswood's point. At worst, it's a vivid entertainment. At best, a subtle education in the way the bass accelerated the evolution of popular music over the half century from Jimmy Johnson's occluded appearances with Buddy Bolden to that moment when Bill Black stoked the Mystery Train behind Scotty Moore and the young Elvis Presley. And it lends quietly heroic status to William Manuel 'Bill' Johnson, who gets disc three to himself. Born the year before WC Handy, he straddled the ragtime and jazz eras and died in a Texas nursing home shortly after his 100th birthday in 1972, having outlived such latter day icons as Paul Chambers and Scott LaFaro. BRIAN MORTON

Can't Stop It! II: Australian Post-Punk 1979–84 CHAPTER MUSIC CD ***Primitive Calculators And Friends 1978–82*** CHAPTER MUSIC CD The first chapter of *Can't Stop It!*, released in 2002, was a bracing enough corrective to the Northern Hemisphere's stranglehold on post punk nostalgia that it was easy to overlook its faults – a few second-rate contributions and an overwhelming privileging of the song. *Can't Stop It! II* has its share of genuine surprises but there's still an unacknowledged cringe regarding music that escapes the gridlock of melody, the inclusion of scabrous Slugfuckers offshoot Rhythmx Chymx notwithstanding.

Case in point: Severed Heads, Australia's most important avant electronic outfit, are on determinedly poppy form on "Lamborghini". That's no bad thing, as Tom Ellard's melodic faculty was more advanced than most, proven by the thin excuses for tunes scrawled across contributions from The Jetsonnes, Use No Hooks and International Exiles. Despite these qualms, *Can't Stop It! II* is essential for uncovering The Goat That Went Ome's "Pirate Song" and Belle Du Soir's "Treasure Island", plus excellent tracks from Scattered Order and volume one alumni Essendon Airport, Tactics and Philip Brophy's Asphixiation.

Chapter Music is on safer ground with Melbourne's Primitive Calculators. Their sole album, which pits Suicide rhythms against livewire blasts of gutted guitar and electronics, is the most enduring artefact of Australia's post punk explosion, and the scrappy live recordings on *Primitive Calculators And Friends* are exhilarating, particularly an excoriating attack on Johnny O'Keefe's "Shout". It also compiles the group's "I Can't Stop It" 7", the legendary Little Bands compilation 7", assorted post Calculators recordings from Zye Ye Ye, Take Two, The Egg and Dave Light, and live recordings from Denise Hilton's Thrush And The Cunts. It's as good an overview of their self-contained scene as you could ask for. JOE DALE

Ballads Of The Book CHEMIKAL UNDERGROUND CD Idlewild singer Roddy Woomble came up with the idea for this collection after their collaboration with writer Edwin Morgan on their 2002 album *Remote Part*. It invites Scottish writers like Michael Faber, Ian Rankin, Ali Smith and Louise Welsh to provide lyrics for musicians like Norman Blake, Alasdair Roberts, Trashcan Sinatras and King Creosote.

The author Alasdair Gray has devised the cover, in one corner of which is the legend "Sing as if you live in the early days of a better nation". The writers themselves either weren't given this advice or chose to ignore it, as titles like "The Weight Of Years", "Jesus On The Cross", "If You Love Me You'd Destroy Me", or "The War On Love Song" make clear. It's a pretty bleak and blasted set. The sexual psychodrama of AL Kennedy with Sons And Daughters stands out, with its series of loving threats and the promise to *"take away your skin so there's no secrecy"*. Alan Bissett's bus queue kickings and council flats are rendered by Malcolm Middleton into an equally grim GarageBand-esque backing.

Woomble's idea foregrounds the issue of interpretation. Most artists here have opted not to dwell on the verbal basis of the project but tried to slot the lyrics into their normal practice. So Mike Heron on "Song For Irena" absorbs John Burnside within his usual tangential arcs and Vashti Bunyan (qualifying by residence?) delivers Rodge Glass's words in familiar layers of tremble, her voice and playing so fragile you feel it might evaporate without the support of multitracking. It gives the project integrity but also a certain plod – which given its Scottish Arts Council funding feels frankly inevitable. SAM DAVIES

Radon 2006 RADON CD This latest bulletin from the Radon Collective, which stretches from Paris, France to Alexandria, Virginia, brings together a cross section of the American and European undergrounds. Artists involved include strange singer songwriter Jameel Abdul Kebab, gonzoid guitarist/vocalist Daniele Brusaschetto, the Yma Sumac like Sikhara, electronic eccentrics Tenth To The Moon, Hyy and Mr Natural, and the industrialised chaos of United Scum Soundclash. *Radon 2006* rekindles the flame of interesting underground music that the Los Angeles Free Music Society once fanned into life with compilation albums like *Blorp Essette* and *Blub Krad*. It is therefore gratifying to know that LAFMS veterans Smegma are part of the Radon Collective and their contribution, "Ashes", is one of this collection's highlights. It hovers around a half spoken beat vocal that inevitably gets sucked into a maelstrom of blustering noise, whirring wings and kitchen sink cacophony. The other highlight is saxophonist Steve Mackay's "Last Of The Alien Encounters", where he returns to the terrain he mapped out on his *Michigan And Arcturus* album to let loose another interplanetary saxophone solo. EDWIN POUNCEY

doing so, they align themselves with Jackman's more enigmatically conceptual solo releases, in particular *Verhalte Dich Ruhig* and the *Laus* 7" composite pastiches of classical music, and a series of 7" and 10" records made up of recordings of gunfire.

It's unclear what the inscrutable Jackman is hoping to achieve. *Amen* is surely a reference, however oblique, to the etymology of the word 'organum' – a form of medieval vocal polyphony based on Gregorian chant. Most likely he is critiquing religious sanctimony. If so, *Amen* is a limp riposte, and as much of a curate's egg as *Sanctus*. One senses he realises this. A note in his Website discography section reveals that we'll never hear the third part, as "the trilogy was cancelled at the request of David Jackman."

NICK CAIN

Charlemagne Palestine
A Sweet Quasimodo Between Black Vampire Butterflies

COLD BLUE MUSIC CD

In one small respect at least, Charlemagne Palestine's long wait for due recognition has been positive. The abrupt ending to side one of the mid-1970s Shandar vinyl release of his *Strumming Music* always meant the temporary breaking of a spell, an unfortunate loss of continuity while the record was turned over. Then, for a further 25 minutes, you could sink back into that extraordinary, obsessive billow of sound. The CD format is more respectful of the intensity that comes with duration in Palestine's work. *A Sweet Quasimodo Between Black Vampire Butterflies* is another instance of his strummed piano music: alternating tones conspiring with a depressed sustain pedal to create a deep well of resonant clusters radiating overtones.

Strumming Music was inspired by the sonorous particularities of the Bösendorfer grand. For this piece, recorded a year ago at a concert in Berkeley, California, Palestine uses two Yamaha pianos simultaneously. The initial impact is absorbing – once again, an enveloping music. A secondary impression is, once again, astonishment at the physical control exercised by Palestine in terms of stamina and attack. The title of the piece may carry an air of decadence, but this remarkable music crucially involves muscular strength and highly disciplined touch. Pleasingly, the recording retains Palestine's introductory comments to the audience and a brief song delivered with accompaniment from a rubbed brandy glass.

JULIAN COWLEY

Panda Bear
Person Pitch

PAW TRACKS CD

Having once watched Animal Collective play a frenetic, mesmerising gig despite the theft of their mini-disc of samples that evening, it's tempting to suggest that their music is less the sum of its campfire psychedelia parts than a powerfully focused state of mind. Having settled away from the other members in Lisbon, Collective's Noah Lennox aka Panda Bear has still made an album as cheerfully overwhelming and full of sonic elation as anything on the last two group albums.

At once immersive and elusive, *Person Pitch* is disorientatingly kaleidoscopic, with layers of samples repeating, building than ebbing away like countless reflections between two facing mirrors. A textural banquet for the ears: sharp and crisp upfront, warm and golden underneath, with Lennox's echoing plaintive vocals recalling Brian Wilson, yet always distanced and subsumed into the mix. The lengthy "Bros" opens like a sparkling *Pet Sounds* call for freedom – *"Hey man, what's the problem?/Don't you know that I don't belong to you?"* – before zooming out to reveal a dense lattice of strumming, reverb and owl calls that suggests an oppressive weight of future possibilities. "Good Girl" moves through tribal percussion into a rolling piano motif, punctuated by diving splashes, before emerging as woozy, chopped up Tropicália, while the breathy Cocteau Twins dreamworld of "I'm Not" provides a brief moment of relaxation. Mostly, *Person Pitch* is as intensely invigorating an experience as Animal Collective at their best, evoking that childish state of half-terror, half-wonder as the world towers overhead.

ABI BLISS

Tim Parkinson
Cello Piece

EDITION WANDELWEISER CD

Very few composers have made use of the shuffle play function offered by CD players. Tim Parkinson is one who has used it creatively. His austere and ostensibly minimal *Cello Piece* (2004), written for cellist Stefan Thut, consists of 12 sections that can be played in any order. This isn't, by any means, a new strategy (Pierre Boulez and Earle Brown, for example, have written compositions that may be tackled in this way), but Parkinson has constructed each of his 12 sections of music so cunningly that there are no clear beginnings or endings anywhere in the score. None of the musical events offers any indication as to what has gone before or what will happen next. Within each portion there are a number of shifts in perspective – new ideas are introduced when you least expect them. Even after several listens in standard play, it's hard to predict when changes are about to occur, and once the numerous permutations offered by shuffle play have been factored in, the piece assumes a complexity that such minimal materials would seem to deny.

Except, on reflection, the material isn't minimal at all. As with Morton Feldman's works from the 1960s, Parkinson uses repetition intuitively rather than according to a fixed compositional logic, and the range of string articulations and sonorities that Thut has to produce is extensive. What's more important is that Parkinson has avoided making music which draws attention to either its or the performer's virtuosity. The unostentatious non-Romantic presentation and compositional integrity remind me somewhat of Bach's *Cello Suites*: a total music.

BRIAN MARLEY

PG Six
Simply Sorry

DRAG CITY CD

A number of groups in the American neo-psych folk underground regularly juxtapose two rather dissimilar styles: experimental improv (often electric) and more or less traditional folk forms (often acoustic). This curious mash-up – itself partly rooted in a selective remembering of early generations – is reflected in acts like Pelt, Matthew Valentine, Feathers, Tower Recordings and PG Six, the moniker of former Tower guitarist Pat Gubler. PG Six's first two releases brought together a brooding mystic sensibility with spectral fingerpicking, covers of quasi traditional tunes and a sensitive dalliance with songless timbres and tones. Gubler's lyric experimentalism, which simultaneously dissolves and affirms a sense of folk continuity, also shone on last year's *Music From The Sherman Box Series And Other Works*, which consisted mostly of chiming, ancestral explorations of oddball harps.

With such great music already racked up, it is hard not to feel slightly sorry about *Slightly Sorry*, Gubler's first release on indie powerhouse Drag City. Assembling a cast of gifted New York players, including Sue Garner and journeyman guitarist Bob Bannister, Gubler has made a solid, if fitting, rock move. The opening hurdy gurdy, bongo delicacy, ironically titled "Untitled Micro Mini", is followed by a great ballad, with some gut bucket organ and a plaintive chorus worthy of Neil Young. But as the combo numbers roll along, Gubler himself seems to recede, like he's wearing a suit a few sizes too big. The man is a frail singer and a haunting picker, which means that he, like Nick Drake, shines most in acoustic and melancholic settings, which you get here on his matchless cover of "Lily Of The West". By comparison, the Wurlitzer soaked songs about babes and blues lack salt. *Slightly Sorry* is a strong release, but one senses Gubler slightly turning away from his proper, and frailer, muse.

ERIK DAVIS

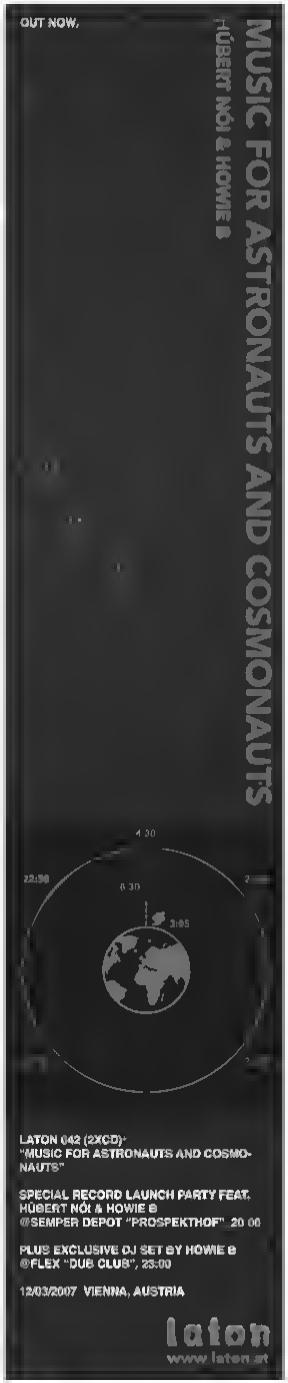
Dave Phillips
A Collection Of Curses

BLOSSOMING NOISE CD

Dave Phillips is an integral cog in Switzerland's Schimpfluch collective, a group dedicated to continuing the extremist traditions and aesthetics of the Viennese Actionists who rose to prominence during the 1960s. The word Schimpfluch translates as 'abuse' in German, and there is undoubtedly a violent current worming its way through this collection of abstracts and outbursts which reach across the last decade of Phillips's career. *A Collection Of Curses* is crammed full of phlegmatic gurgles, porcine grunts and the sounds of numerous intimate bodily functions – celebrations of animal nature, both theirs and ours. These are punctuated by eviscerating shards of noise and banshee screams that are equal to anything issued recently by Wolf Eyes and their ilk. The results are often unsettling, putting the spooks up anyone who listens too intently. It is the presence of the organic suffocating amidst the synthetic wreckage that truly makes the skin crawl.

But it is on the homeward stretch, with "Fog Scrub" and the "Hermeneutics" series, that the collection really hits its stride. Sourced from tracks by his old hardcore group, Fear Of God, Phillips tenses and morphs the material into something even more brutal, creating the kind of beat blitzkrieg that brings to mind Bay Area train wreckers like Spazz, No Comment and San Diego's almighty Crossed Out.

SPENCER GRADY



The Boomerang New reissues: rated on the rebound

Nico

Nico *The Frozen Borderline 1968–1970* RHINO 2xCD One might plausibly sketch a certain history of the mid 20th century around the Gypsy figure of Ms Christa Paffgen aka Nico It begins in the ruins and trauma of defeated Nazi Germany and ends in protracted narcotic exile In between well who isn't here! Coco Chanel and Fellini Lee Strasberg and his Method Alain Delon and Serge Gainsbourg Brian Jones Bob Dylan Jim Morrison Plus of course, pivotally there is Andy and The Velvet Underground

But posterity might well judge that the true heart of this still rather myth clouded and unclear life can be found in two astonishing and grievously underrated works, from 1965 and 1970 *The Marble Index* and *Desertshore* If all you know of Nico is a certain pre Goth heroin-stunted caricature then you will be truly staggered by the depth and reach of these John Cale sculpted works by how sublime how sonically lush and Baroque and nonpareil her Song is herein rendered

There are songs here ("Afraid", "Frozen Warnings") that are among the most sheerly beautiful the 20th century produced If most of her contemporaries singer songwriter' work from that time was gently acoustic and blandly introspective or grubbily 12-bar and still fundamentally rooted in notions and forms dependant on the blues.. then this work sounds like it fell fully formed from some other universe It may in some sense be the whitest music ever heard in what is still ostensibly rock 'n' roll – somewhere between JS Bach Joe Meek and the work to come of German film composer Peer Raben ("All That Is My Own" from *Desertshore* is eerily like some of Raben's work for Fassbinder)

At times it feels derived from the darker end of surrealism – a nursery rhyme logic equal parts Bataille and Brothers Grimm, or maybe the dark warning/mourning words of Paul Celan and Ernst Junger reset as chimingly avant garde Lieder Song as a vapour of distilled emotions set like a series of dark pearls in Cale's micro universe of shimmer and haunt There are moments here too when Cale manages to meld together the two extremes – wistful/wracked – of The Velvets "All That Is My Own" may be the great lost Velvets track, while "Evenings Of Light" also almost uncannily, manages to predict current Scott Walker

Although there are tints and echoes of Germanic folk song this still feels like it came out of some strange blue nowhere There wasn't anything remotely like this in 69/70 and hasn't been since And this isn't mere cold experiment but a truly haunting personal invocation There is singing here – actual singing – that is artful subtle breathtaking and a world away from the lazily blankly dark line readings Nico later resorted to

As well as *The Marble Index* and *Desertshore* in their entirety we get them almost entirely repeated in alternate/demo versions – which are, for once, different enough to actually justify their inclusion, plus a handful of previously unheard songs at least two of which ("Sagen Die Gelehrten" "Rave Revellier") are the equal of anything on the two albums Nico and Cale both deserve proper recognition after all this time for this music of colour and risk, heart and cold heat and invention **IAN PENMAN**

Ornette Coleman *To Whom Keeps A Record* WATER CD A ludicrous amount of praise was heaped on last year's *Sound Grammar* a routine performance by an audibly ageing musician lent authority by simple dint of rarity Coleman's is a risky strategy – part stubbornness part naivety – because making any release seem an event almost begs for a disappointed backlash But than *To Whom Keeps A Record* comes along and sharply underlines the obvious conclusion that if the Ornette of 2007 is a doughty senior and a proud outsider trading on the unshakable loyalty of his supporters and ironically still more on the gradual, grudging surrender of those who once dubbed him a charlatan the Ornette of 1955 and 1960 was an artist of formidable vision the work far too confidently achieved to be marginalised as experimental

Critics often comment on the bitty nature of the Coleman discography padded out with unauthorised releases, semi-bootlegs apparently suppressed items like *Chappaqua Suite* and *Crisis*, garbled messes like *Skies Of America* Much of the best stuff has perversely appeared on oddments collections like *Art Of The Improvisers* and *Twins*. Here is another example both of oddments and of startling quality There are two versions of the classic quartet on *To Whom* – one track with Billy Higgins at the kit, the rest with the edgier Ed Blackwell That single October 1959 track comes from the *Change Of The Century* date the fourth for Atlantic The others come from two sessions in July 1960 from the dates that yielded *This Is Our Music Art Of* and *Twins* The present selection was a Japan-only release in 1975 The untitled themes were named for issue using segments of Ornette's credo "Music always brings goodness to us all Unless one has some other motive for its use"

"Music Always" is a bright, winding line Ornette's delivery and tone are exquisite soaked in the blues and with two distinct references to bebop classics Don Cherry's solo is built on a single inch interval and as always on a latter day remastering it's great to hear him yanked forward in the mix As Byron Coley makes clear in a useful liner note these are great *ensemble* performances The horns take solos and bassist Charlie Haden has a delightful feature on "Brings Goodness" but the greatest impact comes from the coach built theme statements and developments There's a bolder approach to metre on the later stuff with the bassist holding the centre and everyone else whirling round that "To Us" has a fabulous call and-response opening for horns and percussion followed by one of Ornette's most trenchant solos of the entire Atlantic years "PS Unless One Has" has a defiant blues confidence but the other highlight is "Some Other" a plangent ballad that draws as much from Johnny Hodges and Willie Smith as from Charlie Parker

Completists who haven't already stumped for the Japanese issue will want it by definition but this is more than a collectors' item. For all its messy origins and long eclipse I'd say it's one of the best Ornette albums out there **BRIAN BORTOS**

Magazine *Real Life* EMI CD *Secondhand Daylight* EMI CD *The Correct Use Of Soap* EMI CD *Magic, Murder & The Weather* EMI CD Howard Devoto of Magazine is one of post-punk's most honourable figures He quit The Buzzcocks practically before they had started one of the earliest people to become impatient at punk's diminishing yobby raucousness He also disbanded Magazine in 1981 realising that they would only outstay their welcome if they lingered superfluously into the 80s He only grudgingly played on *Top Of The Pops* and his performance was so sarcastically self sabotaging that it caused the single to actually go down the charts as a result. His effective retirement is Duchamp like in its restraint, compared to his peers

Emulating the restlessness and changeling instincts of a Bowie or an Iggy Devoto sang his way through Magazine's four albums as if constantly on the edge of sheer boredom "Shot By Both Sides" from 1978's *Real Life* is his Non Alignment Pact, his refusal to be bound by any particular movement or ethos He duly suffered for it – 1979's *Secondhand Daylight* was derided by journos who confused its cinematic, coloured in qualities with Prog rock. However for all Devoto's pretentiousness (in the best sense of the word), Magazine somehow never quite transcended their 1978 selves, and were eventually outflanked by the likes of Joy Division. "Definitive Gaze" (which opens on John Leckie-produced *Real Life*) and "Recoil" are highly scenic and John Barry esque Yet the late John McGeoch's guitar is very jerky very tinny – very New Wave, frankly His riffing on "Rhythm Of Cruelty" leaves you lukewarm while Devoto himself struggles to escape the net of subconscious Bowie-isms on "Talk To The Body".

1980's *The Correct Use Of Soap* represents their zenith Devoto kings of love with a sort of wide eyed repulsion or pretends to be loveless as on the haughty "You Never Knew Me" Producer Martin Hannett lends a flattering aura, a stillness, a resonance Most interesting are the cleverly de funked version of Sly Stone's "Thank You (Falettinme Be Mice Elf Again)" and the almost soulful "Stuck" Yet Magazine were never quite able to lubricate their slightly stiff caucasian style with funk By 1981's *Magic Murder & The Weather* they'd calcified with Devoto's changeling snide vocals now sounding almost Kenneth Williams-like the music a mess of flange bass and ephemeral synthpop stylings (half the group were now playing in Visage) At this point, Devoto bravely called time **DAVID STUBBS**

John Martyn *Grace And Danger Deluxe Edition* ISLAND 2xCD UK dubmaster Dennis Bovell once proclaimed Jimi Hendrix as the true originator of dub techniques and experimentation On a less extravagant scale, that mantle passed to John Martyn the folkie who evolved into a radical sonic explorer with his slurred vocals melting into the rippling guitar emanating from the Echoplex reverb unit – inherited from his studio dabblings with Lee Perry That resulted in tracks like "Small Hours" sampling flocks of geese, and the molten abstractions of "Big Muff" Later on 1981's body and soul-damaging *Grace And Danger* Martyn versioned The Slickers' rudeboy anthem "Johnny Too Bad" – the one that graces the film *The Harder They Come* – and it's the unreleased 12' extended dub version that reappears here in all its unhinged glory New pretenders in the world of dub and psych-folk should be strapped down to check Phil Collins drums on this one **STEVE BARKER**

The Psychic Paramount
Origins And Primitives Volume 1 & 2
NO QUANTER 2xCD

New York trio The Psychic Paramount avoid falling into well worn improv patterns through sheer spontaneity, engaging the forces of impulse and coincidence by playing doggedly and hard. Their very formation was spur of the moment – just five days before embarking on a European tour in 2002.

Following their debut album, grandly claimed to be the loudest of 2005, *Origins And Primitives Volume 1 & 2* is a double CD of home recordings by guitarist Drew St Ivany that attempt to capture their impulsive methods at the moment of creation. The settings are small with just a few instruments and a batch of effects, but the manner in which each improvisation thrashes and snorts as it attempts to establish the limits of the equipment does something to capture the ragged edges of the trio in full flight. The first disc is dominated by abrasive delay-treated guitar – on the first track swooping around a main riff like attack helicopters and subsequently tearing through multiple inversions of the same distorted riffs with something like the metallic attack of Circle. The second disc is given over to echoed fingerpicking improvisations that evoke the shamanistic psychedelia of Popol Vuh's soundtrack to Werner Herzog's *Aguirre Wrath Of God*.

It's undoubtedly rather perverse that their second release should be a double disc collection of solo recordings. But it fits the ethos of a project that thrives on the haphazard. The way they attack and overwhelm the limitations of the home setup suggests they could cause shockwaves in any kind of playing environment.
DEREK WALNSLEY

The Reveries
Live In Bologna
RAT DRIFTING CD

Rogue Canadians in Bologna in May 2004. The Reveries are Eric Cheneux, Ryan Driver and Doug Tielli, and their brief is to deconstruct standards. Imagine the Chet Baker songbook rendered by Eugene Chadbourne. All three of the trio sing and use mouth-speakers designed by Cheneux, which somehow channel instrumental sounds through the musicians' mouths. Electric guitars, bass harmonica, nosefluta and saw also feature. Arrangements are sparse and fragmentary, spidery lines loosely wound round the damaged contours of familiar melody, the meaning Billie Holiday or Julie London spun from the ballad. 'You've Changed" is here reduced to mannerism and mumbling. Duke Ellington's 'Mood Indigo" worn until threadbare.

Against all the odds, these performances have a curious appeal that increases on repeated listening. The trio are clearly used to one another's company as improvisers and coordinate well in the business of taking tunes apart. The ballads are flattened out and drift but they retain a shadowy charm. *Live In Bologna* brings to mind that series of highly entertaining song based records Steve Beresford made for the NATO label during the 1980s and also for the Chabada label with saxophonists Lol Coxhill and Tony Coe as The Melody Four. Those had more wit and were less formulaic than The Reveries, and it's good to be reminded of them.
JULIAN COWLEY

RTX
Western Xterminator
DRAG CITY CD/LP

Jennifer Herrema's follow up to 2005's lustrous, vocoded *Transmemnecon* takes a confident stride in a full blown Metal direction. The album opens with the uncharacteristically mellow, flute infused title track, and the cover, hand drawn by Herrema, casts her as the Pied Piper. It's deliciously calm and downbeat, making way for the Metallic eruption to follow. If *Transmemnecon* was a careful right turn after the low budget theatrics of Royal Trux – her previous group with Neil Hagerty – she still retained a freak edge with her new unit. With this release, that's about to change.

Western Xterminator's superb musicianship and assured muscle-Metal works against Herrema's cut-rate outlaw appeal and is in danger of going too far in the direction of Guns N' Roses. While her trailer trash persona may have lost a chunk of its appeal once she outed herself as a committed Republican and Bush supporter (*The Wire* 248), this album has some potent, first-rate Blue Oyster Cult moments. "Bella To Pass" is an assured good time rock anthem with vocals kneaded deep inside the mix, letting the layered guitars wield their raw magic. The tremendous "Black Bananas" – about a garbage collector – has chainsaw guitars shredding through the surface, while "Wo-Wo Din" with its stabbing male vocals and staccato fuzz guitar ventures right into Death Metal territory.
ANNE HILDE NESET

Shah-Jo-Raagi Faqirs Of The Mausoleum Of Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai
Pakistan: Faqirs Of Sindh
DCDRA CD

Contained in southern Pakistan's Indus Valley is yet another splinter musical tradition: shah-jo-raag, which draws upon the poetry and mystical tenets of the Sufi faith, as does Pakistan's better known liturgical form qawwal. *Faqirs Of Sindh* documents the melodies that faqirs improvise around verse written originally some 250 years ago by Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai. The contemporary interpreters of his lyrics are heard in his mausoleum: their tenor voices describing slow arcs in mid-air above accompanying lutes.

The four compositions comprising *Faqirs Of Sindh* clock in at well over 15 minutes each, plenty of time in which to marvel at the lengthy melodic exposition and the shimmering mausoleum reverb which trails from each note sung here. Those used to the vocal pyrotechnics of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan may come away unmoved by this set; for all of the subtleties manifest in grouped voices singing in split octaves, the fact remains that anything approaching combustion and subsequent lift off only occurs in the final moments of a given performance. Also, there is an air of ascetic severity clinging to the shah-jo-raag tradition, reminiscent of North India's khyal vocal style.

Another compilation drawing from the Sindh region, *Sindhi Soul Party* (issued in 1999 on Germany's Network label), is far livelier, surveying the songs of street musicians as well as those of devotional singers attached to specific shrines. The contrast between this older disc and the current *Faqirs Of Sindh* also points up the allure of variety in the album programming of Dcora's classic era during the 60s and 70s. Of late, the A&R policy of this blue plate ethnographic imprint seems to focus on individual performers. While immaculately transcribed, as the Faqirs Of Sindh surely are, one misses the element of surprise once guaranteed by an Dcora album.
RICHARD HENDERSON

Konrad Sprenger
Miniaturen
CHOOSE CD

One of the recorded highlights of 2004 was *Ort*, long string player Ellen Fullman's wonderful song project with Berlin musician Konrad Sprenger (aka Jörg Hiller). The 32 tracks on *Miniaturen*, Sprenger's solo debut, confirm his singular slant on composing, arranging and performing. The unorthodox list of instruments used is indicative: mandolin, harmonium, synthesizer, guitars, sinewave generator, piano, steel drum, accordion, trombone, acoustic guitar, siren and mechanical bird organs. *Miniaturen* is stylistically expansive too, taking in elements of folk, pop, slow minimalism, noise, Renaissance courtliness and motorik rock. There are fleeting evocations of numerous kinds of music and regular shades of Neu! and The Velvet Underground. Yet overall it sounds like nothing else.

The constituent recordings were actually made between 1997 and 2003. Since then Sprenger has been searching for ways to make it all cohere to his satisfaction. Now he's found the form: a montage with all the richly suggestive appeal of one of surrealist Joseph Cornell's boxed assemblages: paradoxically allusive yet original, familiar things made strange, a waking dreamwork. In part pastiche, in larger part enigma, Sprenger gets the proportions, the movement and variations of mood in this music just right. Like *Ort*, it hooks you immediately: draws you in and just 36 minutes later it ends, leaving you wanting more. The curious magic of *Miniaturen* will surely be one of the enduring recorded highlights of 2007.
JULIAN COWLEY

Stars Of The Lid
And Their Refinement Of The Decline
KRANKY 2xCD/3xLP

This is Stars Of The Lid's first album in five years. Initially appearing in the early 1990s as ticket holders of the Texan space rock shuttle, the duo of Adam Wiltzie and Brian McBride have since dispersed both geographically (to Belgium and California, respectively) and aesthetically, moving from guitar drone to a hypnotic minimalism that's equal parts modern composition and limpid post 4AD abstraction. It's fairly predictable stuff at first blush – the ebb and flow of luminous textures, with strings and brass holding long, slow tones. But there's a near-translucent quality to Stars Of The Lid's simple, affecting music, hovering between the sanctity of Arvo Pärt and Giacinto Scelsi's thoroughgoing examinations of the tonality of various instruments.

The slow spillage of dampened piano melodies on "Don't Bother They're Here" recalls another significant precursor: "1/1" from Brian Eno's *Music For Airports*; other pieces are stationed somewhere between David Behrman's *On The Other Ocean* and the ghost melodies of Bark Psychosis' "Pendulum Man". *Refinement Of The Decline* shares with these predecessors an inner calm that's born of the abandoning of the temporal, sourcing intimate immensity from the patient unfurling of gently considered, weightless compositions.
JON DALE

Asmus Tietchens
Zwingburgen Des Hedonismus/ Mysterien Des Hafens
DIE STADT CD

The ninth instalment of Die Stadt's extensive reissue schedule of Asmus Tietchens's 1980-91 discography sheds some interesting light on the peculiar musical itinerary of one of Germany's most multifaceted electronic composers of the last 30 years. From his humble tape machine manipulations in the 80s onto the densely synthesized Cluster Schulze associations and then through to his rhythmically playful 'personalisation' of pop music during his brief Sky Records tenure in the early 90s, Tietchens' output has been consistently characterised by an adventurous sense of the given time, generally unconcerned with stylistic anchors, rather giving leeway to ideas and concepts that sprout in the studio environment. *Zwingburgen Des Hedonismus* is a typical example of this. Originally released as a one-sided LP in 1987 on Swedish label Multimood, the 21 minute piece momentarily veered away from Tietchens' reacquainted abstract electroacoustic sound on 1984's *Formen Letzer Hausmusik*, instead sculpting some classical sounding skeletal piano timbres with a Fairlight CMI music computer (hence the track's initial labelling as "Faircomp 1J"). A different version, tagged on as a bonus "Faircomp 1K", is a little less meagre in its tonality.

"Mysterien Des Hafens", one side of the *Face To Face Volume 1* LP with French dark eroticists Die Form, turns out to be initially an outtake from the *Geboren, Um Zu Dienen* album on Esplendor Geométrico's label. It's easy to see why: it's one of Tietchens' most overtly Industrial pieces, chugging away in a menacing tribalistic tone. A precursor to the rhythmic noise of Thorofon and Grunt, just as Vidna Obmana was to the ensuing slew of largely Scandinavian Dark Ambient projects.
RICHIE RUCNPAUL

Amon Tobin
Foley Room
NINJA TUNE CD

A foley room is the place where sound effects are added to film or video. The controlled environment of post-production means a foley artist can work on creating just the right door creak or glass smash. It's a strange job: foley artists achieve their sounds through surprisingly inventive, often counter intuitive methods, but have to aspire to anonymity – if the ingenuity of their work gets noticed, it has failed to sound sufficiently natural.

Amon Tobin's new record isn't strictly about this strange condition, but it is about the ways concrète found sound can be absorbed and

manipulated to surprising ends. His previous technique was based on the meticulous creation of new records out of old, as accented by their titles: *Bricolage Permutation Supermodified* For *Foley Room* Tobin has sought out and recorded his own original samples from machinery to insects to other musicians. The uses he puts them to are occasionally cheesy. There's possibly a clumsy nod to Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* going on in "Esther's", where the growl of a motorbike engine cues up some garbled Dick Dale-style surf guitar. Elsewhere, Tobin's playfulness is more successful. "Big Furry Head" opens with some clanging Glenn Branca sonorities before using a lion's snarl almost as percussion. 60s psych atmospheres recur unexpectedly among the icy layers of digital trickery. A heavy organ drifts through "The Killer's Vanilla", woozy indistinct vocals through "Always", and a breath of Tropicália through "Ever Falling". But the most constant element is Tobin's beat-chopping, which just about keeps *Foley Room* the right side of triphop's ponderousness. The best track, "Bloodstone", is also the odd one out: a lateral-thinking swirl through Balkan strings played by The Kronos Quartet.

SAM DAVIES

Assif Tsahar/Cooper-Moore/Chad Taylor
Digital Primitives

HOPSCOTCH CD

What's this, then? Post-Ayler saxophone banshee Assif Tsahar playing over a backbeat and to the accompaniment of what sounds like a giant Jew's harp? The Country album? An unexpected slice of raw Americana from the Underground Orchestra man? That's pretty much how it goes down and it's an astonishingly good piece of work, pulled off without a shred of compromise and with the tinge of humour that Tsahar's earlier work has often lacked. When Cooper-Moore puts down his diddley bow, mouth bow and banjo to sing his own "Ol' Saint Peter", any remaining expectation of another fire and brimstone date goes out the window.

A couple of the tracks – "Human Interface" and "Bones" – sound improvised, or spontaneously composed, and these come closer to Tsahar's normal range, but not by much. On the former it sometimes sounds as though the inspiration might be Ornette Coleman's trio with David Izenzon and Charles Moffett. Cooper-Moore's accompaniments have a cantonal persistence and Taylor is as unafraid of simplicity as Moffett was.

There's a touch of digital warble and windchime on "Electric Garden", and Tsahar switches to didgeridoo for "Digital Primitives". Otherwise, it's pretty much the basic trio and that Ornettish mix of back-Country blues, free harmony and mixed up fours. I wouldn't count on hearing another one like this any time soon but for now it's the freshest thing around.

BRIAN MORTON

Tuk
Shallow Water Blackout

(K RAA K)? CD

Tuk is Frenchman Guillaume Greux and these are his laptop compositions developed over the course of several live performances between 2004–06. Apparently the sound source is mostly classic 70s and 80s rock and pop making this faintly reminiscent of The Young Gods's early approach to sampling, in which they recycled chunks of ancient Glitter and Hendrix, using them as fossil fuel for their own contemporary conflagration. Tuk, however, grinds down these elements to ever more refined, inner barely recognisable granules.

The net result is Fennesz-like. "Stilnox" is all sparking and flickering circuits, caught between violent life and imminent death – though without Fennesz's melancholy or sweeping grandeur. "Hall Of Mirrors" is actually closer to Terry Riley's *Poppy Nogood* in its bubbling, shifting persistence, its atoms bombarding and rebounding endlessly in a hall of mirrors. "Insomnia", is well titled, depicting electronically a brain that refuses to stop spinning, helplessly emitting synaptic spurts. "Lady Jane" hunts at some barely imaginable, barely visible pulchritude behind a snowstorm of interference.

With "Rock And Roll Dreams Come Through", the source material becomes a little more evident; fragments of yester-rock create a series of tiny, illuminating detonations in the memory pool, and then in floats an incongruous passage of acoustic authenticity, a harp, perhaps, or six-string guitar. Finally with "Mental Tuk", there's an element I believe I recognise – the opening seconds of Frankie Goes To Hollywood's "Relax". A fine album which swills around your cerebellum like electric eels in a fishtank.

DAVID STUBBS

Tussle
Telescope Mind

SMALLTOWN SUPERSOUND CD

Bizarrely, San Francisco rhythm jemmers Tussle used to include Vetiver's Andy Cabic in their ranks on bass guitar. Hard to divine much common ground between Tussle's percussion workouts and Vetiver's hypnotic folkiness, but Cabic has now left, so Tussle's quartet have swapped instruments and brought in drummer Warren Huegel from stints with Damo Suzuki and Daevid Allen. On offer are stripped down rock or dance jams. Kit, percussion and Alexis Georgopoulos's bass guitar carry the weight, with the odd cackle or cutting remark from a gnarled old synthesizer up the back. Main tracks are intercut by abstract episodes of synth mayhem, of which only "Cloud Melodie II" has much point.

The Krautrock template still works today, as evidenced by the enjoyment recently offered by Brighton's Fujiya & Miyagi and Christof Kurzmann's The Year Of. However, many of Tussle's tunes feel earthbound when examined at close quarters, though they may do fine as DJ crate fodder. Separated from the functional dancefloor environment, the basslines of "Warning" and "Kindermusik" fail to stand alone, sounding like the rest of the song is missing. The album loses its way midway through – "Cloud Melodie" and "Elephant" are vague, incomplete experiments. Then things take a disco swerve – less rock, more dance – and the quirky quotient goes up, so that on "Flicker" and "Trappings" Tussle at last sound like they are having fun. For "Powl" a couple of members of likeminded outfit Liquid Liquid bang along a welcome marimba and timbales, and stripped back Kraut groove finally turns into a full blown percussion flab buster.

CLIVE BELL

Mika Vainio
Revitty

WAVETRAP CD

Mika Vainio returns with his first solo release under his own name since *In The Land Of The Blind One-Eyed Is King*, was recorded five years ago for Touch. *Revitty* (*Torn*) resembles that album in that it has a loose, improvisational feel and the longer tracks move through many different phases. However, it's mostly a harsher, bumpier trip, with Vainio using very prickly sounds and structures. The album has its quieter moments. The 20 minute "yksinäisyys, suru, katkeruus" (which translates as "loneliness, sorrow, bitterness") is a well defined series of atmospheres with an opening that recalls the ambiguous tone clusters of Messiaen's organ compositions. Almost everything else on *Revitty* is much harder edged, though. Most of the material is jerkier, moving from moments of silence to jagged, magnificent outgrowths of noise. It's worth remembering that notwithstanding the warm clean tones of Vainio's early work as Ø there lies a love for uncompromising sounds – from the psychopathic hillbilly outsiderism of Hazil Adkins to the analogue rasp of early Industrial music. Oddly, there's a long stretch in "Raatelu" when Vainio appears to be paying some sort of warped homage to the Metal guitar solo – some of it even sounds as if it has been fed through a vintage guitar fuzzbox. It's unpleasant, to say the least. Vainio has developed an agressively unpredictable way of working – the tracks are volatile and open to sudden new developments. Noise – digital and otherwise – can easily dally in its own comfort zones, but *Revitty* is far from comfortable. A decade and a half after the pioneering early Sähkö recordings, Vainio proves that he's still an awkward customer.

WILL MONTGOMERY

Various
Awon Ojise Olorun (Popular Music In Yorubaland 1931–1952)

SAVANNAHPHONE CD

Generations before Fela Kuti devised Afrobeat, Yoruba musicians from the west of Nigeria were re-imagining their popular and folk idioms, fashioning them into an elastic musical language which could express the post-colonial experience of an ancient tribe suddenly bounded by a newly formed nation state. This collection of recordings offers a fascinating series of glimpses into a vanished, transitional world. It is, by turns, exuberant and sombre, respectful and slyly subversive.

This is the dawn of the Nigerian recording industry. At the time, the Yoruba had developed three main musical genres, all of which are represented here. The first – sekere – hints at the influence of Islamic North Africa, its percussive impact softened by sinuous melodies summoned from the goje (one stringed fiddle). This stately, considered quality made it the natural form for serious political comment and protest, as exhibited here by the solemn claim of Alhaji Munuru Singera: *"We are entitled/To the proceeds of the sale of our Kolanuts/It is imperative that we receive the bonus due to us."*

By contrast, Yoruba responding to life in the rapidly expanding international port of Lagos seized on the availability of cheap imported guitars and developed an altogether more populist and irreverent sound – juju. Akanbi Wright's upbeat and rhythmically insistent composition expresses urban hedonism with real charm – the title, and indeed the entire lyric, is "Everybody likes Saturday night". But juju could be turned to a more serious purpose – one of the highlights of this collection is the swooping, incantatory "Okoye Ati Ogunniya", a deeply spiritual plea for the continuing relevance of traditional religious practices.

The final set of recordings focuses on music for drums and voice only. Drumming ensembles had been a part of Yoruba tribal life for centuries, but it was only with the advent of the apala style (which came to prominence in the late 1940s) that they started to be regularly recorded. And if anything here could be said to have paved the way for the rise of Afrobeat, surely it's a song like "Bisimilayi Raba Na", by the architect of this new sound, Aminu Olanibigbe. The swaggering spirit of adventure captured in this song still sounds thrilling – to contemporary ears, it must have been nothing short of inspirational.

CHRIS SHARP

Peter Zummo
Zummo With An X

NEW WORLD CD

The velvety tones of Peter Zummo's trombone have graced several key releases of New York New Music over the years, from Peter Gordon's *Brooklyn* to David Behrman's *My Dear Siegfried* and Guy De Bièvre's *Bending The Tonic (twice)* though he's perhaps best known for his collaborations with Arthur Russell. The latter's distinctive cello playing and singing also grace Zummo's debut album, *Zummo With An X*, originally released in the mid-1980s on Loris and reissued here with a hitherto unavailable quintet version of *Song IV*, one of four pieces Zummo provided as music for Trisha Brown's 1985 ballet *Lateral Pass*.

Although the composer compares *Lateral Pass* to a classical four-movement symphony both its chamber scoring – joining Zummo and Russell on trombone and cello are Guy Klucevsek on accordion and percussionists Bill Ruyle and Mustafa Ahmed – and its discreet exploration of simple material are intimate and haunting, especially on *Sci Fi* which owes as much to Russell's distinctive vocals as it does to Zummo's delicate muted smears.

The final movement, *Song IV*, is the most substantial, and appears here in two versions, one for trio (Ruyle, Russell and Zummo) and one for the quintet. It's a remarkably simple yet compelling investigation of a four-note descending scale propelled gently yet decisively forward by Ruyle's tablas, and it features exquisite work from all involved. The disc also contains a 1980 work for trombone, cello, trumpet and marimba entitled *Instruments*, each of whose seven movements is based on "an intervallic leap repeated at individual repetition rates. Different notes sound together in unplanned ways, resulting in combination (bass) tones."

In keeping with his desire to get away from a 'militantic' sort of minimalism, Zummo recorded the piece direct to reel-to-reel in a Soho loft with the windows open, so the low rumble of distant traffic is as much part of the listening experience as the conceptually rigorous yet remarkably supple music.

DAN WARBURTON

Avant Rock Reviewed by Edwin Pouncey

AIDS Wolf
The Lovvers LP
LOVEPUMP UNITED CD

Canadian noise quartet AIDS Wolf describe their sound as recalling what Captain Beefheart meant when he said, "a squid eating dough in a polyethylene bag". On *The Lovvers LP* they're certainly fast, but much more spiky than bulbous, although their female lead singer occasionally sounds like tortured Magic Band member Antennae Jimmy Semens (and that's a compliment). Rather than simply playing unstructured noise, however, there is a distinct discipline at work here, a crafted sense of composition that unexpectedly rears up out of the sonic wreckage.

Richard Amp
Moi Non Plus
ALL TS NUMBER CD

As well as founding AMP Richard Amp (aka Richard Walker) has formerly collaborated with many of the key outfits of the 1990s Bristol experimental and psychedelic scene, including Flying Saucer Attack, Third Eye Foundation and Crescent. London drone rockers Loop and Main have also benefited from his adventurous playing technique. *Moi Non Plus* is an album of solo piano compositions that are reflective and haunting. Extra atmosphere is created with electronically altered recordings of a rainy street and birdsong, over which Amp plays his Satie-style living room pieces. It's like walking into his house and catching him playing with the front windows flung open to the elements.

Awesome Color
Awesome Color
ECSTATIC PEACE CD

Awesome Color are a guitar, bass and drums trio from Ann Arbor, Michigan who (legend has it) learnt their chops from no less a deity than Stooges drummer Scott Asheton, who lived round the corner. That primal vibe is certainly in evidence on this debut LP. Now relocated in Brooklyn, NYC, Awesome Color have added a smear of street smart punk to their sound, overpainted with flailing Lynyrd Skynyrd guitar. "Hot Energy" throws a Steve Mackey style sax skronk (from one Wade Kergan) into the mix that – together with guitarist Derek Stanton's flattened vocal – allows their original Ann Arbor rock roots to poke through.

Bruckmayr
A Little Warning From The Pimps
ANGELIKA KOEHLERMANN/MONKEY CD

At the wheel of this rumbling bulldozer of a disc is hunched the bare chested and tattooed figure of Fuckhead mainman Didi Bruckmayr, who, together with various heavy friends, crashes on to the dancefloor with some severely warped pop, rock and disco. He gleefully hacks into these genres with serrated wit and wisdom. Coming across like Giorgio Moroder meets Leonard Cohen performing the Soft Cell songbook, Bruckmayr's brilliantly performed electro pop and Motörhead-strength hard rock connect perfectly for the ultimate death disco showdown.

Do Make Say Think
You, You're A History In Rust
CONSTELLATION CD

The fifth record from Toronto ensemble Do Make Say Think is another engrossing set of mostly instrumental pieces that move in several different directions at the same time. The opening "Bound To Be That Way" is a slowly building anthem, replete with crashing cymbals and Spaghetti Western horn arrangements. "The Universal" explodes with a guitar workout that would turn Glenn Branca green with envy, again supplemented by a horn section that blends in perfectly with the amplified bloodbath. This is big band experimental rock on the grandest and most impressive of scales with not a trace of musical mildew or corrosion.

Julian Fane
Our New Quarters
PLANET MU CD

Julian Fane is a singer-songwriter from Vancouver, Canada whose vision is epic, sprawling and dreamlike. *Our New Quarters* is the natural follow-up to 2004's *Special Forces*, only this time his high-pitched vocal is the more prominent instrument. While vast shifting clouds of string arrangements, pulsating synthesizer shadows, haunted organ embellishments and complex beat patterns hover overhead, his unsettling siren voice emerges from the Lynchian gloom of the charred soundtrack like a strange hybrid of Scott Walker, Robert Wyatt and Radiohead.

Foetus
Damp
ECTOPIC ENTS CD

Foetus (aka Jim Thirlwell) returns with a compilation of previously unreleased tracks. It starts with a big band bang and ends with a 16 minute instrumental. In between are stacked collaborations with pals like Matt Johnson of The The, Jim Coleman and The Melvins, whose "Mine Is No Disgrace" is the perfect stoner response to Yes's "Yours Is No Disgrace". Frog anthem Thirlwell howls like a wounded animal producing one of this collection's highlights. *Damp* is a valuable introduction for anybody yet to step into his precarious but surprisingly cinematic musical dimension.

KLoAK
A Boy Getting Pregnant
ESCHO CD

Instead of sticking so rigidly to his home turf for new signings to his label, perhaps Thurston Moore should take a trip to Denmark and check out KLoAK. This seemingly straightahead punk quartet kick out with both barrels blazing, a hardcore Dead Kennedy's on acid vibration that's almost overpowering. KLoAK's noise factor is enormous, but their trick is to suddenly lapse into a less hostile approach, layering subtle chanting under the barb wired shriek of clashing guitars and torn throat vocals. If Jefferson Airplane had sacked Grace Slick and become a No Wave group after getting punched out by the Hell's Angels at Altamont, this is what they would have sounded like.

Roy Montgomery
Inroads
REBITS 2xCD

Fabled New Zealand guitarist Roy Montgomery is given a retrospective with this vital double disc that gathers 22 tracks from various sources, mostly out of print or unreleased. Titled *Paved (Disc 1)* and *Unpaved (Disc 2)*, *Inroads* reveals a unique style that breaks away from the usual (and somewhat overplayed) American Primitive/Takoma route that many solo guitarists choose to wander, and plunges into a thorny thicket of multitracked reverberation that pays homage to the likes of John Martyn, Loren Connors and Sterling Morrison. Montgomery's real skill, however, is to produce fascinating trance inducing guitar music that drones and rocks at the same level of intensity, like a one-man Velvet Underground.

Panther
Secret Lawns
FRYK BEAT CD

Panther is the mutant strain of Charlie Salas-Humara, a one-man music machine whose broken disco riffs lock into a secret pulsebeat weapon that roughly pushes Prince (in the form of a giant robot) and Eden up against the wall and pulls the trigger. *Secret Lawns* is a mad mixture of unpredictable beats, hooks and catchy beatbox routines that lead the listener through black alleys and gaming arcades, discovering new musical thrills at every turn. At one point we are left alone with only a brushed cymbal sample for company while the rest of Panther's song takes a well deserved break. Isolated from the busy clutter, this simple device sounds devastating.

Shedding
What God Doesn't Bless, You Won't Love: What You Don't Love, The Child Won't Know
HOMETAPES CD

Shedding is Connor Bell, whose elaborately titled CD recounts periodic trips to his grandparents' home and bird sanctuary in Louisville, Kentucky, and also recalls his introduction to the music of jazz legend Eric Dolphy by his friend Simon Furnish. Both adventures are cleverly entwined into the three tracks here, which Bell describes as being "A collage, a collaboration, a tribute", where echoes of Dolphy's playing and the ghostly aura of birdsong fuse, teetering at the edge of becoming a symphonic field recording.

The Shit Spangled Banner
... Wash America With Come
MANHAND CD-R

Originally released in 1994 as part of Ecstatic Yod/Ass Run Actuel LP's series, this curio from the Sunburned Hand Of The Man time capsule is a captivating example of the group's early development. Starting with a faltering, freaky phone message that sounds as though it might have been salvaged from some lost Orchid Spangladora session, The Shit Spangled Banner unfurl a cacophonous canopy of electric psyched-out energy that begins to resemble a jamming duel between Amon Düül I and The Allman Brothers. Elsewhere, traces elements of Tuvan throat singing and street rap colliding with a half remembered version of "Help I'm A Rock" by The Mothers Of Invention subliminally filter through. The brief here seems to have been "Here's the studio and some rented equipment... Have a ball!" For all its highs and lows, this is an underground classic you should hear at least once.

Sun Dial
Shards Of God
ACME CD

If Comets On Fire excite you, this remastered blast of psych rock shockers from guitarist Gary Ramon's Sun Dial group will really blow your gasket. Garnered from a career spanning 1991–2006, *Shards Of God* re-acquaints the world with Ramon's uninhibited acid guitar shriek, the roots of which are unapologetically buried deep inside the works of Hendrix and Barrett-era Pink Floyd. His approach was to re-establish psychedelic rock as a genre in its own right with songs like the soaring "Exploding In Your Mind", the Floydian overdrive of "Open Your Eyes" and the blues rock fuzz of "Rollercoaster". Also including rare single mixes, previously unheard tracks and Byron Coley sleevenotes, *Shards Of God* is as heavy and spiritually uplifting as its title (ripped from an Ed Sanders novel) suggests.

Transitional Phase
Transitional Phase
LAST VISIBLE DOG CD

Made up of members of San Francisco's SubArachnoid Space and Growler's Geoff Walker, Transitional Phase are the result of a late evening jam session from eight years ago. Cut into seven phases, the atmosphere ranges from hallucinatory space rock to more angular experimentation where a Neul rumble can be heard in the background. On "Phase Seven", the ensemble really turn up the heat, producing a seamless sound collage sewn together from the other phases. The roar of looped guitar manipulations and muffled drone bulge eclipses almost everything that follows it.

Z
Mikabe
TRANSDUCTION CD+DVD

Originally issued in Japan in 2006 on their own Grok Plastique imprint, Z's *Mikabe* finally gets a European release. Founded by drummer brothers Jun and Ayumu Nemoto and guitarist Kei Uozu, the trio recruited bassist Takehiro Yamada in 2003. Meanwhile Jun's decision to switch from playing drums to blowing saxophone gives the unit another direction, where the US hardcore blast of yore gets caught up in a powerful free jazz vibe. Z are definitely rock, but it is hard not to imagine the ghosts of Kaoru Abe and Masayuki Takayanagi slowly nodding their heads in approval. □

Critical Beats Reviewed by Philip Sherburne

Lars Behrenroth/Ripperton
Organism/10A
LIEBE*DETAIL 12"

With earlier precision, Hamburg's Liebe*Detail continues to make the most out of the split single format. While its signings are often unknowns even within underground dance music circles, L*D sides sound more like instant classics by veteran producers. (Perhaps as much as anything, this is an argument for bringing back faceless Techno bollox.) Hamburg's (via Los Angeles) Lars Behrenroth hews to the label's melancholic side with an eight minute build-up of layered synthesizers, all stately fourths and fifths recalling Carl Craig's singular sense of focus. Ripperton – one of Liebe*Detail's better known artists, with records on Connoisseur Num, Border Community, Wagon Repair (as Lazy Fat People), etc – also goes long, using nine minutes to lay out a long, meandering arpeggio in the style of Ame's "Rej" that seems perpetually to be spilling over into run-off channels. The second half of the song is awash in massive pads playing uneasy, discordant counterpoints. The beat is blunt and a little stumbling, qualities Ripperton plays up by relying on breathers like pitfalls, little pockets of bewilderment.

Jacopo Carreras
Olanto
LAN MUZIC 12"

Under the influence of artists like Carl Craig and Radio Slave, big-room Techno feels in some ways more singleminded than ever in pursuit of the big payoff. Stripping melody down to a monotone growl that's infinitely filtered, these tracks live or die on the strength of a lone chord, sometimes a lone note, that acts like a black hole, sucking all energy inside it. "Olanto" is very much in this vein, and I mean 'vein' almost literally: its single, sawtooth note, toggling between octaves, swells and throbs like a blood conduit coursing through the crowd. The difference between Carreras and Craig or Radio Slave is largely rhythmic: in keeping with labelmates like Exercise One, Carreras packs "Olanto" with a wealth of shimmying details, from rolling hi-hats and woodblocks to a chorus of cicada buzz. But in contrast to IDM's penchant for getting lost in the minutiae, the focus here is always on linear motion – an emphasis underscored towards the end of the song by what sounds like a freight train's lonely whistle.

Emperor Machina
Vertical Tones & Horizontal Noise Parts 5 & 6
DC RECORDINGS 2x12"

Andy Meecham's Emperor Machine project continues to explore what happens when you pair squealing analogue synthesizers with rocksteady funk-punk grooves. More than just an exercise in sound design and stock beats, though, the Emperor's domain increasingly encompasses fertile fields of full-blown songcraft. "Laboratorios" warms up with the quavering of truculent oscillators, blasts off a chord borrowed from "Wordy Rappinghood", and proceeds to map a galaxy of pulsing riffs and weird modal melodies. (As you can tell by the metaphor, there's more than a whiff of Progressive rock's extraterrestrial yearning in both the music's structure and its sci-fi harmonics.) All this is topped off with a generous improvisatory feel, as on "Rimrammamm (Ave's Uninterrupted Version)" which features plenty of real-time dub fireworks, heavy on squelching ring modulations and slapback delay. The Machine has never sounded quite so much like a full group, especially on "Who You? (Full Length Version)", which balances an obligatory octave-jumping bassline with baritone growling and herky-jerky guitar parts that veer between 70s rock and Afrobeat funk.

Prinz Ezo
Organic Squares
TENDER PRODUCTIONS 12"

The fourth release from Prinz Ezo, aka Danish producer Bjørn Svin, feels curiously anachronistic, drawing from a modest pool of experimental Techno tropes that have been largely discarded in recent years. But that's precisely the record's charm. "Ice" knocked hither and fro with tumbledown rhythms, is indebted to Thomas Brinkmann's aleatory dust-ups, with a steady kickdrum holding the tracks assemblage of skittering loops from spinning out of control. The buzzing digital "Insect" recalls a time when tempos under 90 bpm remained open to exploration, thudding ominously along beneath a pall of hissing white noise and oily drones. "Hedgehog" is the solo banger, hammering through bunker walls to situate itself in the middle of a heaving Tresor dancefloor, circa 1995. Its overdriven drums, blasts of static and mournful synthesizers hint at Pan Sonic, Cristian Vogel and RA-X. The EP comes to rest with the beatless "Semi Mood", a shimmering swathe of Dark Ambience recalling the isolation tank vibes of R&S's much missed Apollo sublabel.

Ernesto Ferreyra
Memoria Colectiva
MUTEK REC 12"

Cordoba, Argentina's Ernesto Ferreyra, now living in Montreal, is the latest member of the MUTEK community to emerge as a solo artist (he also records with Guillaume Coutu-Dumont, of the duos Egg and Lucy as Chic Miniature). This three-track EP is a remarkably self-assured solo debut. Ferreyra's music is clearly indebted to his Montréal colleagues, from the pervasive micro-sampled blasts of voices and acoustic instruments to the tight, fidgety drum programming, but all three cuts are very much imbued with a style all their own, distinguished by knotty patterns and quirky melodies that appear and disappear at a moment's whim. The highlight, "El Cuento Del Tio", piles dizzying polyrhythms over a 4/4 beat, resulting in a staggered, drunken feel that's more Afro-Cuban than Schoffel, echoed acoustic guitars might feel like a lush indulgence if they weren't easily out of key, and handclaps, fingersnaps and woodblocks cut through it all like hot knives through cotton candy.

Juju
Punks/Mogera
NARCO HZ 12"

Proof that dubstep is spreading beyond London, the fledgling label Narco Hz was founded by the Colombian-born DJ and producer Juju, a longtime fixture on San Francisco's Jungle scene. "Punks" suggests the advantage of being outside looking in: a thrilling cure for dubstep's turgid, halfstep predilections, the track rides a baffling, snare-heavy rhythm that offers a perpetual tug-of-war between four-square quantization and dubby slink, while a syncopated, almost triplet bassline sledgehammers home a near jubilant promise of violence. "Mogera" unfortunately is nowhere near as inspired: minor key synth stabs and annoyingly aliased squiggles sound like they're marking time, waiting for the rebirth of Techstep. But no matter. "Punks" is a triumph, the kind of tune rewinds were invented for.

Manmadesciance
One
PHILPOT CD

In reaction to the ubiquity of the hyper-edited 'plip plop' sound of so much minimal House and Techno, a number of the scene's producers are beginning to add doses of sampled acoustic instruments – think of the Gypsy horns in Ricardo Villalobos's "Fizheuer Zieheuer" – or sophisticated instrumental arrangements. That's not automatically a good thing: former Junglists 4Hero's gradual evolution into a group has resulted in a kind of adult contemporary music that's tastefully snoozeworthy. Manmadesciance – the Stuttgart trio of SoulPhiction, Phlegmatic and Nik Reiff – mostly side-step such pitfalls on their debut album, infusing loop-heavy grooves in the spirit of Moodymann and Theo Parrish with a generous helping of live keys, horns and woodwinds. On the rare occasion when a jazzy coda verges on the overly polite, there are plenty of unsettling sounds and passages to tip the balance back towards dub's unruliness. *One* isn't revolutionary, whether taken as homage or pastiche: it's clearly in thrall to 70s soul and black American dance music. But the album's 15 songs and interludes still brim with fresh ideas and a genuine sense of yearning: the music alone is enough to acquit its borrowings of harsher charges.

Various
D*I*R*T*Y Edits 005
D*I*R*T*Y 12"

With disco's currency trading at an all time high, dance music is awash in reissues and edits, many of which feel inconsequential, if not downright unnecessary. But France's Pilooski and the D*I*R*T*Y crew have a wider range than most: so far their *Edits* series has encompassed Can, Edwin Starr, Alan Parsons Project, Cat Stevens and even Frankie Valli and The Four Seasons. On the fifth instalment, they lean increasingly towards the cosmic hippy vibe, indulging soul only on an edit of Jackson Jones's "I Feel Good", but even there, despite requisite cowbell, handclaps and chicken-scratch guitar, swooping oscillators and predominant strings give the funk an offworld feel. The edit of Amon Düül's "Kismet" offsets a pastoral swirl of gently plucked acoustic guitars with tentative piano and no-frills downtempo drumming. They finish not with an edit but a simple reissue: "Glastonbury", from late 60s psychedelic act People. Garlanded with daisies and flutes, it feels a bit like the faux English folkie equivalent to Spinal Tap's "Stonehenge". But as goofy as the song is – *"You will find the truth of the flowering tree/ In the long lost dance of Glastonbury"* – its tumbling funk drumming is undeniable. Hard to believe DJ Shadow hasn't sampled it yet.

Various
This Is Hartchef
HARTCHEF DISCOS 2xLP

Hartchef is one of the more curious German labels: a bit like Cologne's answer to Perlon, prone more to hiccupping rhythms and absurdist flourishes than coolly functionalist, machine-clean output. (Hartchef's most prolific artist, Audio Werner, has also recorded for Perlon.) The label's tenth release gathers work from longtimers (Werner, Frank West) and newcomers (Ralph Sliwinski, Picoteque) drawing from Cologne, Berlin, Montréal (MUTEK's Guillaume & the Coutu Dumonts) and even Tibet. All eight tracks are caked in grit and propelled by lurching, jacking rhythms. Flecked with congas and decked out with gravelly spoken word bits, many sound like they were reconstructed from a grease-caked cassette rescued from a battered car abandoned beneath a Chicago overpass. Guillaume's quick-edit horns reference Akufen, Fahone People's haphazard loops call out to Smith N Hack, Ido Dshkopun's insanely catchy tom tunings reconfigure M_nus's beats for the Raymond Scott generation. Rickety, uniformly groovy and not afraid to be a little goofy, every track is a standout.

Jens Zimmermann
Tranquillite
K2 12"

I can't recall when Kompakt last put out a record quite this strange. Strange for them, anyway: these two tracks forsake the label's customary pop and Trance hallmarks for a swirling psychedelia not often associated with Cologne. Ricardo Villalobos's influence is everywhere here, from the dark vocoding of "Tranquillite" – the first syllable is practically a quotation of the Chilean's "Easy Lee" – to the liquid sense of movement, with both tracks pulled along by an undertow of kick drum while toms, congas, squelches and copious effects ripple and swirl. Both tracks pace uneasily, as though pinned between ecstatic release and brooding introspection: accumulating delay threatens to swamp the midrange while bursts of white noise pose false lines of escape that only loop back into the murk. □

Dub Reviewed by Steve Barker

Noel Ellis
Noel Ellis
LIGHT IN THE ATTIC CD/LP

The appearance of Alton Ellis's boy comes as a welcome surprise in Light In The Attic's *Jamaica To Toronto* series, devoted to the output of Jamaicans exiled in Canada. Six mixes all extended into dubwise versions occupy this collection of tracks cut for Summer Records in 1979 under the supervision of Jerry Brown, up from Bullwackies in the Bronx, keyboard maestro Jackie Mittoo during his northern sabbatical, and the legendary Willie "Armagideon Time" Williams. In fact, one of the tracks turns out to be "Rocking Universally", a lighter take on Williams's classic, recast for punk immortality by The Clash, and reversioned a couple of years ago by Basic Replay under the names of Will (sic) Williams and Cousin Marshall as a DJ version of the original. That's the highlight. On the rest, Ellis employs an over-plaintive colourless vocal style that's best used sparingly as it tends to exercise meaning from the lyric. For Wackies fans, though, this is a must for the dubs.

Justin Hinds
Dip And Fall Back
FOX 7"

Although Justin Hinds and his harmony group The Dominoes – named after Fats – became one of the most popular outfits during the ska and rocksteady era, their star mysteriously faded with the advent of reggae. The most likely reason was that Hinds's deep devotional commitment to Rastafarianism made it an easy decision to return to the hills: his songs always reflected earlier indigenous musical forms. Country syllogisms and biblical metaphor, and he remains a largely unrecognised folk lyricist of the highest order. Luckily he was tempted back into the studio in 1975 by producer Jack Ruby aka L Lindo, then riding high on the waves created by Burning Spear's *Marcus Garvey*. The resultant *Jezebel* album, cut at Federal and Channel One studios, is a lost classic with many of its sides released as singles plus dub treatments from King Tubby. So here we have the gorgeous horn arrangements of Herman Marquis on alto sax, Bobby Ellis on trumpet and Vin Gordon on trombone in an updating of the old mento tune "Dip And Fall Back" dubbed into an irresistible melange. As *Jezebel* is no longer available, it's as near as we get to the full feast.

Keith Hudson
Nuh Skin Up
PRESSURE SOUNDS CD/2xLP

The trilogy of Keith Hudson's innovative dub excursions that began with *Pick A Dub* culminated in this long overlooked 1982 album, the deepest, darkest and rerest of the triumvirate. Built from the tracks on 1979's *From One Extreme To Another*, the album arrived in a plain sleeve via the Joint International label set up in NYC as a collaboration between Hudson and JA expat Junior Walker. The Soul Syndicate and, allegedly, a "white band from Baltimore" provided the rhythms that Hudson clinically manipulated into stuttering journeys of near existential distress and claustrophobia. To have visuals attached would be too painful.

Joe Mansano
Joe The Boss: The Productions Of Joe Mansano
TROJAN 2xCD

Joe Mansano was a Trinidadian accountant who arrived in the UK in the early 60s and made his way into the back door of the burgeoning UK reggae scene via a cosmetics company sideline. Along with Graeme Goodall at Doctor Bird and Jack Price at Sioux Records, Mansano's Joe Records defined the sound of UK reggae in the late 60s. His business acumen and promotional skills helped him identify a niche: producing homegrown early reggae, primarily for the discriminating skinhead market, in direct lineage from JA's Prince Buster instrumental albums on the Upsetter label and Lynford Anderson's countless "Pop A Top" variations via his Andy Capp incarnation.

Early singles – "Your Boss DJ", "The Bullet", "Brixton Cat", "Musical Feet" – mimicked the DJ intros popular in Jamaica at the time. In fact, Mansano started up by cutting dubplates using a local DJ's name in the intro segueing into a well-known instrumental and then selling on for the DJ to use on his sound system as a "special". The 50 odd tracks here are largely instrumentals, some with DJ chat and a handful of vocals – the best known being Ray Martell's "She Caught The Train" (covered by UB40).

Mundo
Still Stand Rasta/Hear Dis
DUB ASSEMBLY 10"

The evolution of a DJ's style from UK Garage through to dubstep is not all that surprising, maybe with Grime and two-step's healthy underpinnings of dub and raggamatic stylings, it's the place to be. Jason Mundo is based in Texas, and this little plate lays waste to all competition. "Still Stand Rasta" seduces with a skipping steppers intro before the obligatory sampled patois-late the sucker punch lands with the entry of a bassline like a rollercoaster's first big drop. A lighter wobble then ensues, and we have the most perfect example yet of a rootical dubstep style capable of crossing dancefloors. "Hear Dis" is more orthodox in its reggae leanings, but just as potent.

ScanOne
Dark Horse Dubs EP
COMBAT RECORDINGS 12"

Combat Recordings aims to crush the tensions between electro, breakbeat and electronica in a series of 12's programmed for unmakeable movies, or maybe future remixed soundtracks. ScanOne, aka Jude Greenaway, is a producer and DJ with a background in visual editing as part of the Light Surgeons live visual crew, who deploys his editing skills in subsuming those London-style stomach churning basslines within the slouching new breakbeat speeds employed on these tracks. Dubwise seems to pick up the pace but with equally draining bass drops and cinematic sweeps that halt the half step and introduce a sense of foreboding. Edinburgh's Wee DJs' remix of "Kik It" is the original's Autechre-laced Grime kicked upstairs with vicious ASBO provoking tribal drums. Blackmass Plastics take the Wee DJs' version, slam on the brakes and literally steamroller the rhythm so it's a stretched, distorted and mangled remnant of the original thrown back at the feet of its creator.

Paul St Hilaire
Adsom: A Divine State Of Mind
FALSE TUNED CD/LP

On his last album, 2003's *Unspecified*, Paul St Hilaire signed off with the drifting and seemingly incomplete "Changeling" almost implying that his next work would be a dramatic shift away from his initial Tikiman incarnation, when Rhythm & Sound provided deep dubby Techno washes over his mandraxed vocal meanderings. Surprisingly, the move is back to the reggae fount rather than a pursuit of some radical dread ambience. Not that the experimental edge is gone: half of the 12 tunes extend beyond the vocal into restrained dubs that layer the customary echo and reverb treatment with sampled surprise loops laid gently over the round edge skank. Some of the material tends towards more orthodox content, but it's all beautifully crafted modern roots with the vocals better balanced than when Rhythm & Sound ruled the rhythm. "Office" can only have been written as an oblique tribute to Ricky Gervais, and on the juddering bass washes of "Humble", previously visited electronica depths are replumbed as St Hilaire validates his Techno roots.

Wailing Souls
Classic Cuts 1978–1984
GREENSLEEVES CD

This is the first release in the Most Wanted series, launched to celebrate 30 years of Greensleeves and collecting together selections of key tracks from a particular artist or group. In their late 70s second life, after producing a series of classic roots singles for Clement Dodd at Studio One, The Wailing Souls released four albums and around a dozen 12"s on Greensleeves. Sharing only two tracks with the excellent Pressure Sounds compilation of 2004, all the tracks here are remastered from the original tapes and feature the full 12" extended cuts complete with dubs, many debuting on CD. These tunes, from the time when Sly, Robbie and The Revolutionaries were catching the swing with the rockers sound that dominated Channel One and the rest of reggae in the late 70s, find the group at the height of their powers. □

Electronica Reviewed by Chris Sharp

Thomas Belhom
Cheval Oblique
APPARENT EXTENT CD

Thomas Belhom is a peripatetic French drummer who spent five years in the USA touring and recording with the likes of David Grubbs and Calexico. He now lives in an isolated farmhouse outside of Le Mans, where he makes poetic and quixotic recordings as unconventional as his lifestyle. *Cheval Oblique* is impossible to classify – it's semi-improvised and played in real time, despite the array of electronic textures and field recordings woven into the music. It's a sonic bric-a-brac, but blessed with the kind of radiant, wistful melodies which, differently treated, could find their way into a Yann Tiersen soundtrack. The ceaseless clatter of percussion – sometimes summoned from a standard drum kit, sometimes picked out on stray pieces of metal – calls to mind *Swordfishtrombones*-era Tom Waits, but there's no sense of Weimar stridency or preconceived melodrama. In fact there's something of gamelan's rippling restfulness throughout. Overall, these quirky miniatures leave behind an impression of bucolic wistfulness, playful invention and – crucially – real charm.

Victor Bermon
Arriving At Night
HEFTY CD

Arriving At Night is seamless, self-effacing and unobtrusive, yet it consistently manages to provoke pleasure. It's the deft work of an English literature student at the University of Western Australia in Perth, and it's possible to hear in these polite constructions both the thoughtfulness of the academy and the eerie spaciousness of the landscape that surrounds one of the most physically isolated cities in the world. Not to say that this is minimalist music – as the opening jaunty "Farewell Lunch For Laura" makes clear, it's just restrained. There are artful jazz drum loops of the kind that can only be gleaned from a lifetime of crate-digging, there are long held saxophone and woodwind notes breathing delicate warmth into the gaps between the bars, there are wistful guitar arpeggios which wind through the track like a silken net. In fact (perhaps unsurprisingly, given that Hefty is based in Chicago), there's more than a hint of The Sea And Cake's post-jazz articulations, and this convincing sense of musicality overrides any suspicion Bermon is merely a superior cut 'n' paste beat merchant. And, as they work their way into the imagination, pieces like "Unprepared" speak with a genuine authority.

The Boats
Tomorrow Time
MOTEER CD

Moteer is a loose-knit extended family as much as a label, a web of frail and muted signals which travel between the likes of Hood, Empress and The Remote Viewer. On *Tomorrow Time* (their third album) The Boats – songwriters/sound processors Andrew Hargreaves and Craig Tattersall – attempt to offset this collective tendency towards winsomeness: the opening track is titled "A Sincere Fuck You" and it's followed further in by "You're An Idiot". But this is indie petulance, not unhinged fury, and musically things remain much as before. Which means a balancing act – melancholy melodies set tastefully against crisp, murmuring digitalia and the occasional textural trick like the whispery harp/harmonium conversation which opens "I'm Talking Facts, Not Shit". Elsewhere, the song titles strike a more convincingly regretful note – "The Last Of Our Mistakes" catches the overall mood, with guest vocalist Chris Stewart crooning distantly about having *"no place to go"*. And while, in the long run, the same may be true for The Boats and their delicate, flickery blend of mournful micro pop, *Tomorrow Time* is assured and affecting enough to demonstrate that they're doing more than just sailing in circles.

Clark
Ted EP
WARP CD

Six cuts remodelled from (Chris) Clark's *Body Riddle* album. The young English producer claims Pavement and Autechre as two big influences, and there's a devil-may-care beefiness to his tracks, a slack urgency that informs the foggy discords of the title track as much as the slow march of "Bruise Animations" or "Cremation Drones", a beatless, seething piece that wouldn't sound wrong in a Lynch movie. Bibio's "Ted" remix dunks the whole caboodle in a sheep-dip of wire wool banjos. Clark's sometimes wayward body of work finally seems to be coming into focus. ROB YOUNG

El Fog
Reverberate Slowly
MOTEER CD

Not to be confused with the Fog on Lex, this nameless Berlin producer doesn't, on first spin, seem to be doing much you haven't heard before in the Pole/Jelinek snap crackle stakes. But whoever it is deals the puffs and jets of digital activity down to a new level of crepuscular, crystalline stillness, trickling in the odd Spanish guitar flourish ("The Fog Of The Far Small Town") or electric piano shading ("Out Woods"). "Lily" cues in an almost inaudible string section, while "Smoke And Satellites" ushers in a brushed-drum cocktail jazz sample. But always with the crackles already: a "Quiet Village" for the Max/MSP generation, anyone? ROB YOUNG

Eluvium
Copia
TEMPORARY RESIDENCE CD

This is Matthew Cooper's fifth album for Jeremy deVine's consistently intriguing Temporary Residence label, and it's yet another stage in Eluvium's determined musical evolution. Whereas Cooper's early releases consisted of meditative watercolour pieces for solo piano, more recently bolstered by the grainy surge of processed guitar drones, *Copia* is something else again – a sweep of disembodied sound in which an even wider variety of sound sources are dissolved and intermingled. Strings and brass throng these pieces, softened and subsumed by their own ghostly shadows. The fading radiance and entropic decay of a piece like *The Sinking Of The Titanic* by Gavin Bryars is an obvious touchstone for tracks like "Amreik" and "Indoor Swimming At The Space Station", but the album moves beyond their slo-mo fanfares and reverberant circularity into more melodic territory. "Prelude For Time Feelers" starts with a piano motif which is part JS Bach, part Zbigniew Preisner; it's a skeletal branch which, as the piece progresses, is steadily colonised by amorphous orchestral tendrils. As the firework noise which peppers the closing "Repose In Blue" makes clear, *Copia* is not without sentimental tendencies; to some ears parts of it may seem cloying. But focus on the slurred sonorities in the lower registers, and its rich loam should prove consistently fertile.

Flying Lotus
1983
PLUG RESEARCH CD

Sure, there's a lot of instrumental hiphop out there, but this engaging debut is worth a second glance. Steven Ellison is based in LA, and California's bright, clean light shines through. There's a skewed, impulsive musicality to the way that he blends samples, beats and synths, and a beatific glow, too. The title track starts out slurred, cosmic and weird, with Sun Ra swirls, tinkling windchimes and gentle scratching – but when the shuffling backbeat kicks in, everything is gathered together. Like the late J Dilla's *Donuts*, much of *1983* is made up of one- or two-minute fragments. "Orbit Brazil" majors on dayglo drones harried along by a crunchy handclap, while "Sao Paolo" is a minimal, scratchy loop which drops out to reveal the Brazilian vocals lurking behind it. The jittery static of "Untitled 7" further suggests that Flying Lotus has a genuinely distinctive voice – but with a running time of barely half an hour, *1983* doesn't quite do enough to completely convince.

Liam Gillick
Los Angeles
SEMISHIGURE CD

A real curiosity, this – a short, electronic soundtrack composed by an artist more renowned for his work in the visual sphere. Liam Gillick was nominated for the Turner Prize back in 2002, inspired by architecture and the geometric panels of Mondrian and De Stijl, his art and installations de- and recontextualise corporate and commercial spaces. He was lured into the recording studio by his wife – film maker and artist Sarah Morris – to craft this accompaniment to a movie about movies. Or, more accurately, a movie about the people who make movies, and about the hermetically sealed and narcissistic experience of being in 'the industry'. Morris's wordless film juxtaposes a revealing glimpses of Hollywood life with the flash of paparazzi bulbs and luxurious swathes of red carpet – throughout, the only commentary is this soundtrack. Experienced without the images, it's a strangely artless artefact – passages of moody Ambience morph into glittery piano arpeggios, and artificial strings revolve mechanically, a sterile simulacrum of a typical Hollywood score. As a result, it's difficult to see why anyone who isn't a collector of Gillick's gallery art would want this, but I suppose they might.

Hug
Heroes
KOMPAKT CD

At the age of 21, Swede John Dahlbäck has amassed a discography which puts to shame producers twice his age. His glossy, cavernous 4/4 productions have graced labels like Turbo, Dessous and Dahlbäck's own Pickadoll; he's remixed fellow Swedes Erik Prydz and The Knife; and lately, as Hug, he's embarked on a series of 'functional Techno' EPs for Wolfgang Voigt's K2 label. *Heroes* is on Kompakt, and although *Heroes* is unremittingly propulsive there's plenty of subtle variation to leaven the impact of the resonant kick drums. Highlights include the growling synth drone smeared sensuously across the pristine surface of "Sub", the intricately dubbed-up hi-hat patterns that shiver at the heart of "Tactic Without Practice", the arrhythmic metallic feedback which gouges through "My Dinosaur" and the relentless, spartan funk of "Birds". Dark, danceable and rather special.

Pixel
Set Your Centre Between Your Parts In Order To
RASTER-NOTON CD

Danish composer/producer Jon Egeskov started his musical career as a jazz saxophonist, but since acquiring his first computer in 2001, he's taken to electronic sounds with a remarkable sureness of touch. He's far from prolific – this five track album is only his second release in three years – but there's a vibrant sense of concentration: it's abuzz with thought and meticulous to the point of mania. Egeskov's work is intensely rhythmical, and stabs of pristine silence play as much of a part as percussive twitches and bristling slabs of artfully contorted electronics. But where he really sets himself apart from the rest of the post-clicks + cuts diaspora is by managing to incorporate dynamics and beats from World Music into his processed universe. The first Pixel album (*Display*) used Konnakol – the ancient Indian vocal percussion system – as a rhythmic template; this one takes inspiration from African dance music. There's something thrilling, almost transgressive, in the way these organic, traditional patterns are digitally mimicked on the opening track "Drum" – an effect enhanced by the way Egeskov smears his musical components widely and wildly across the stereo spectrum. This limited edition Raster-Noton release is a beautifully presented artefact – the disc and an accompanying art print are sheathed in a long white card case – and it's well worth investigating. ☐

Global Reviewed by Richard Henderson

Steven Feld
The Time Of Bells 4
EARTH EAR CD

Another chapter in a worldwide study of bells by ethnomusicologist Steven Feld. The title, as in previous instalments, conceals musical surprises of many stripes, such as the Sardinian choral singing (reminiscent of Tenores Di Bitti) overlaid upon the bleats of a herd of bell-wearing sheep. A mosaic of sidewalk sounds is offered as prelude to the bells pealing above Venice's Piazza San Marco. Feld, in his notes, poses a Cageian puzzler: does a carillon become more musical by its interaction with public sounds? After Copenhagen and the Arctic Circle, Feld visits Japan, where a chorus of cicadas accompanies the ringing of Hiroshima's peace bell on the anniversary of the atomic bomb's detonation. Feld's recording technique and his sensitivity to the environment surrounding the objects of his fascination is on par with Chris Watson's engrossing field recordings.

Santiago Mutumbajoy
Yagé Pintá! Psychedelic Shaman Songs Of Santiago Mutumbajoy
LATITUDE CD

Resembling a musical adjunct to Wade Davis's *Serpent And The Rainbow* or the suspect writings of Carlos Castaneda, *Yagé Pintá!* is the soundtrack to a 1976 encounter between an American anthropologist and a shaman and healer in Colombia who sings while administering yagé (aka ayahuasca, a psychedelic religious sacrament). These songs, play, both in melody and plainspun texture, as near relatives of the Kiowa peyote chants recorded for Folkways by ethnographer/film maker/hedonist Harry Smith, the latter having learned of the Native Americans' psychedelic liturgy while sharing a jail cell with tribe members. Michael Taussig, from Columbia University, approached the songs here from an altogether more academic angle, making mono cassettes of Mutumbajoy's singing in the course of fieldwork for a paper on the existence of shamanism under colonial rule. Mutumbajoy accompanies his low-pitched, buzzing voice with a shaker, its incessant swish seeming to sweep his patient through the door of perception or a cappella, with only insect song heard in the distance as foil for his cycling melodies. Taussig participated in the yagé ritual, and his notes describe the experience as "ritualised, beautiful enchanting and at times terrifying". Further, he floats the possibility that Mutumbajoy's songs may change the listener's life. With or without otherworldly alkaloids, Taussig may be right. Another great entry in Latitude's roster of renegade ethnomusicology.

Nai Htaw Paing Ensemble
Mon Music Of Burma
FIRE MUSEUM CD

Burma (or Myanmar, depending on whether your government recognises the junta in power) remains a mystery to outsiders, its military rulers seemingly adamant in maintaining the country's isolation. Still, media influences seep through the cracks, endangering the traditions of the Mon people. Having established themselves over 1000 years ago, the Mon were a refined culture of noteworthy aesthetic achievement; in recent centuries, their numbers have dwindled, many having been absorbed into the greater Burmese population. San Francisco ethnographer Rick Heizman has devoted much energy to the recording and preservation of Burmese music. The startling cover image of the metallophone known as batt kine, with some 14 gongs arrayed along the U-shaped spine of a crocodile sculpted from wood, writes its promise of exhilarating, unusual music in bold type. Given this, the album does not disappoint. Immediately one notices an absence of conventional harmony within Mon music. The notion of ensemble playing is turned on its head as well, with individual components (kyam zither, graw viola, the double-reed khanwe) of Nai Htaw Paing's orchestra all blazing their own trails. So much activity, the instruments behaving like free radical molecules, each seemingly independent of the dominant vocal line, sung at stratospheric pitch by Mi Mya Than. As the songs, lyrics are populated by giant demons, spirits and tiny chattering birds, one very quickly comes to accept these radical revisions to the laws of musical physics.

Tagaq
Sinaa
JERICHO BEACH CD

Floating like a butterfly, buzzing like a bee, Tanya Tagaq Gillis multiplies her mastery of Inuit throat-singing technique by digital means; if her investigation of a cappella song in the era of non-destructive, direct-to-hard drive recording brings to mind the recent work of Björk, then it's no surprise to find both practitioners of extreme vocalese duetting on "Ancestors". Tagaq's sub-glottal panting, chopping up rhythmic divisions above which Björk sketches her patented glissandi. As with ethnographic recordings of Inuit katajjaq singing games, the ramped tempo of Tagaq's incessant panting and growling could be mistaken for recordings of especially vigorous physical congress: the Inuit usually end their vocal workouts in a state of collapse brought on by hyperventilation, a round of hysterical laughter forming the coda to most recordings. *Sinaa* could use a tincture of the Inuit's self-induced hilarity, as hearing Tagaq's extending the boundaries of her technique, track after track with attendant air of unrelenting gravitas, proves wearing over the long run.

Tinariwen
Aman Iman
WORLD VILLAGE CD

It is a great distance, on many levels, from the Sahara to the verdant setting of Beth's Real World studio, and one could fret that that the journey might burnish the barbed intensity from Tinariwen's band of desert musicians. Fortunately, if anything, *Aman Iman* reveals this group of Tuareg tribesmen performing with even more intensity. As theirs is music created by nomads roaming a hostile environment, one can't help but sense relentlessness intrinsic to the inexorable mid-tempo trudge that is the rhythm of any given Tinariwen song. This quality lends the rhythm an edge that birthes unease even as that same rhythm seduces. The group's signature multiple electric guitars reference blues playing. But the tangle of electric fingerpicking, eschewing exclusively lead or rhythm roles, begins to resemble a Sahelian equivalent of the ancient form of weaving. *Aman Iman* is at once sinewy and spooky, with lyrical concerns that address both societal oppression and a metaphysical bent borne of the desperate beauty of their home in the sands.

Various
Patchwork Europe: Early Recordings
WERGO WELTMUSIK CD

Patchwork Europe is a successful attempt to encircle and contain what editor Christoph Wagner describes aptly as "the thicket of diversity", being recordings of traditional music from Europe. These span an era that began before the First World War and ended about the time of Elvis Presley's first hits in 1954. The album is assembled to disabuse listeners of any notions of an idyllic past, though, as it presents the then-new instruments, products of the Industrial Revolution, and the stylistic innovations that turned 19th century notions of musicality on their collective head. Portugal's Ermelinde Vitória offers her down-at-heel take on fado. Finnish violinists are parked adjacent to klezmer players from Minsk, the latter abutting a Polish instrumental trio playing a jaunty waltz. The archival engineering is commendable and the sequencing simulates a great party that never was.

Caetano Veloso
Cê
UNIVERSAL/NONESUCH CD

On the evidence of the dry, tersely phrased drumming and fuzz toned guitar sustain prevailing through *Cê*, one might assume that early releases from The Modern Lovers and Pere Ubu had just hit Brazil. A sense of temporal disconnect hovers over the proceedings here, one that serves both to fan interest and foster discontent. Veloso's voice is, as always, an instrument of singular winsomeness, coloured with regret and yearning and camal pangs. *"I only envy longevity... and multiple orgasms"* ("Homem"). Yet anyone expecting the transport afforded by his onscreen performance in Pedro Almódovar's *Talk To Her* will be frustrated by *Cê's* willful embrace of North American rock tropes. Even the dry mix underscores a purposefully deconstructive modus. Yet the tight performances are imbued with energy throughout, and the sound of Portuguese vocals over four square rock drums exerts a kinky, if minor thrall of its own. ☐

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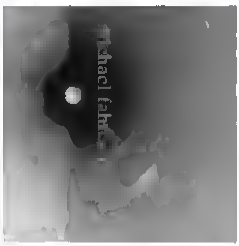
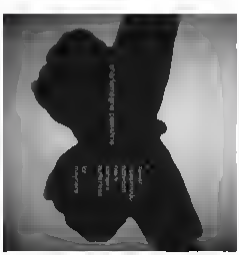


Michael Fahres / The Tubes
I was transfixed by the haunting sounds and poetic pacing of Fahres' music on this CD. Rather than the sound floating through the room, it was as if I was floating in the sound.
— Morton Subotnick

Features performances by Jon Hassell, Mark Adams, Parik Nazarian and soundscapes and natural sounds from Coimbra Portugal, El Hierro (Canary Islands) and Lake Sevan, Armenia.



Charlemagne Palestine / A Sweet Quasimodo Between Black Vampire Butterflies for Maybeck
"Palestine's work offers sonic sculptures to be thoroughly inspected and savored at every moment." —Dean Suzuki, *Wired*

Recorded live in Berkeley California, February 2006 this CD features Palestine performing the long title work for two pianos, singing a few very short songs, and talking briefly about his past.

Hiphop Reviewed by Dave Tompkins & Co

Bunny Rabbit
Lovers And Crypts
VOODOO ERDS CD

From the rap department of CocoRosie's Voodoo ERDS label bounces Bunny Rabbit: a potty-mouthed little madam from North Brooklyn who's hopping mad about all kinds of stuff – that's when she's not engaging in exotic pleasuring techniques. *"Rubbing belly with oil from my papaya"*, *"smokin' poppies, getting sloppy, sippin' syrup"*, or – on "Sexy" – *"taking] a shit in our hands/Put it in our mouths/Chew it up, spit it out"* (awl). Partner in life and crime Black Cracker (aka Celena Glenn) serves a crunky set of backing tracks, stompin' like Missy on "Saddle Up", stinky like cheap-deal fried chicken on "Dirty Dirt", lo-fi two-step on "Lucky Bunny Foot", and surf-guitary on "Sexy". Ms Rabbit likes to get high and loves a good debauch, as "Dirty Dirt" and "Sexy" sprayoaint large, but even though some of her verbal spittle could give Peaches a run for her money, she transcends the braggadocio on the closing track, "St Guillen", a warped elegy to the real-life victim of a brutal rape and murder in NYC last year. No one plugs a finger in this dyke and expects to get away without a flood of abuse, still, there's only so many times you can take the un-ironic boast *"I don't give a fuck"* before craving a nice, quiet warren to disappear down. **ROB YOUNG**

The Game Featuring Kanye West
Wouldn't Get Far
GEFFEN / INTERSCOPE / BLACK WALL STREET 12"

More behind the music music from this industry veil snatcher: this cuts his primest. The story goes that Game was at his house trying to write something positive over Kanye's standard-issue soul-sampling syrup, the Creative Source hook choking on itself (*"you wouldn't get far... far... far..."*) while in the same room Game's teenage sister fretted over what to wear to a party that night. With each outfit, Game noticed she looked more like music video meat – like, say, one of the girls Game might hire for his own. Anyway, if you can get past the misogyny, and the huffy flow, there's no better non-annoying take on the industry's media feedback loop, no rapper who sounds more unsettled by the infinite trapdoors of a world mediated by images. *"I'm watching Oprah covering Hurricane Katrina, I see the same bitch on Oprah floatin' away on the hood of a Camry that was in the vigga Lil Weezy video,"* Game explains at the end. He's conflicted, and paranoid, and beautiful, hardworking women bear the brunt of his anger. Still, *"Don't get mad,"* he says. *"I'm only being real."* **NICK SYLVESTER**

Lil Wayne
Pump That Bass
MP3

One of the better Lil Wayne lines of late: *"I might just fuck around and barf."* Nothing that remarkable here, other than "Planet Rock" getting swilled, though not quite the woodchuck getting creamed by a snowblower that I wished for. Why the Trans Earp synth tinnitus? Just because things are slow doesn't mean you have to twaddle out with a fake string section to compensate. Yet we're thrilled that the orchestral stab in "Planet Rock", the tormented-diva door knocker for so much freestyle music, actually has a name (Orch 5) and an inventor (Dave Vorhaus). This preset was installed in the Fairlight synthesizer and allegedly Vivian Kubrick has the prototype in her basement in England. Not that it's any of our bee pollen what Vivian Kubrick has in her basement in England, but this is according to a guy who was hired by the BBC Radiophonic Workshop for sound effects because he could sustain burps for the richer part of two minutes. **DAVE TOMPKINS**

MIA
Bird Flu
MP3

It was only a matter of time before the "terrorist chic" London based Sri Lankan read what people wrote about her and took "the sound of jump-rope rhymes in a war zone" into epidemiological territory. I dunno, calling a track "Bird Flu" because *"This beat gon' kill everyone!"* (direct quote) seems flip at best, irresponsible at worst, especially when the whole song (available on MIA's MySpace site) and video is recorded in India, a recent stop on the avian influenza A (H5N1) world tour. The beat is fun though: unrelenting rolls of drum corps tom-toms and timbales, with all sorts of chicken squawks and playground chants filling up the few remaining silences. "My beats were too evil" is the reason she gives for not being signed to Rocafella, but I could see this song getting radio play in the same bizarro frequencies Gwen Stefani and Pharrell's "Wind It Up" called home last year, ie wherever "no silly, the beat is the hook" holds some water. **NICK SYLVESTER**

Nas
Where Are They Now (East Coast Remix)
MP3
Where Are They Now (West Coast Remix)
MP3

Nas decides to let the names drop for themselves – more than just bringing out the luminaries for a halftime parade wave. Sha-Rock (of Funky 4+1) always had the class, the clarity and the boa, doing little here to dispel our (DK, maybe just my) infatuation. Often at these posse clambakes, the chip on the shoulder is a radio-sized boil. Yet on the East Coast Remix, MC Shan and Grandmaster Caz carry it with dignity, as does Trio of The Fearless Four, who once gave an underage LL Cool J his first break, letting his dimpleness tag along to after-hours open mic spots up in Harlem. Kool Moe Dee pulls a few nifty Godsend/son tricks. Doctor Ice flies into a turbine of Roxanne handclaps (the best accident in the mix) and Kangol gets subpoenaed by Roxanne's lawyer. Then Just Ice finally shows up, emphatic and vectorless, swinging his clean-up bat as the entire room makes apple sauce in its pants, remembering how this guy once removed his gold teeth and wore them *on top* of his Captain Gucci hat.

Pacific Timers, on the other hand, have less to prove, letting the chips fall on the picnic table out back – like we're all in the same rag-top and we all might fit in the back seat (swap out Candyman for Ganja K), especially if King Tee's still driving that grandma green Chevy catamaran (in his words, "Showboatin'"). And it's good to hear that MC Breeze is getting *"ASCAP money"* (I hope) after Russell Simmons signed and shelved him for two years, fearing he might deflate LL. That's the way of the world, says the Earth, Wind & Fire horn loop. Elapse and habituate – the only thing straining around here is the patio furniture. The best turn goes to Threat, the least famous telling the end of story from Roger "Uncle Jamm" Clayton, who once DJed parties at the Sojourn of Truth Mansion to the LAPD Batterram (who *"took all the glory"*) to getting blunted in the back of the bowling alley Mix A Lot, who might have a bowling alley in his Benz, then appears with his nostrils in a scrunch, bragging about his yard fountain and publishing, and so almost crashes the buzz. **DAVE TOMPKINS**

Juelz Santana Featuring Just Blaze
The Second Coming
NIKE TV ADVERT

Say what you will about The Man's sweatshop dollars, he's paying for our rap music so we won't have to. There's some kowtowing lyrically – I doubt Dipset's Juelz would have worked in *"a legacy is what we trying to leave, ya dig?"* otherwise – but the triumph of this commission is Just Blaze's beat, an imperial battlecry of unison horns and strings that sounds equal parts *Empire Strikes Back* and that one scene in *Gladiator*. Maybe I'm being hard on young Juelz, whose 24 low key years correspond so nicely with the AF1 sneaker's low-cut 25 – which this track celebrates – it's no wonder they got matched up, and in fairness, the guy does know how to stay out of a good Blaze beat's way, cf. "Oh Boy". But it's tough to keep mum when a Harlemite releases a verbally mediocre track called "The Second Coming" just two months after Nas says hiphop is dead, y'know? As for prophecy-redemption will come in the form of a guest mixtape freestyle. **NICK SYLVESTER**

Juelz Santana & Lil Wayne
Black Republicans
PROMO

There's an irresistible new commercial on television: a shoulder to shoulder queue of the NBA's finest strides forward, all clad in their tear-away astronaut suits and immaculate sneakers. In the background, Just Blaze works a John Williams-sized seesaw – it's the kind of huge, hero-making riff that soundtracked The Diplomats' ascension 2002-ish. Meanwhile, Juelz Santana recites a list of divided-we-fall truisms with the kind of undeniable swagger that makes *"They say family that plays together stays together/And one that walks apart just falls apart"* sound emboldening, if not strikingly true. (Dr as Just recently observed on the White Rapper Show: "It's how you say it".) This kind of us-against-the-world vim supercharges Juelz and Lil Wayne's reworking of "Black Republican". The original was the much-ballyhooed meeting of Jay-Z, the cash-flushed "black Republican", and Nas, the never-forgetting "black militant". Interesting conceit, good use of doubling, but ultimately somewhat troubling: the GOP thing only works if you're not actually rich, disconnected and arrogant; and hearing Nas's audio fist-salute made him seem like the worst kind of dreamer (a really old one).

In the first 20 seconds of this version, Juelz spins the difference and makes both seem like posers: *"I feel like a black Republican/Nah I can't call it/More like a black Democrat running dem out of office."* Sure there are the just-for-kicks references (Fergie, Old School video cartridge *Contra*, ostriches) but there's also a respectful nod to Barack Obama (I'm all for it!) – cue mental image of Juelz sitting at breakfast combing the newspaper. An unlikely uniter that Juelz. Weezy represents younger money: *"I feel like a black Republican/Tote a mack in the public and/Act so Souther-un/Die for my brother and/Money."* Wastefully wealthy, by-his-bootstraps fly and making people (girls, mostly) do what they didn't think they wanted to do. Weezy subtly flashes out Jay's lifeless Republican metaphor. He may not have Jay's money, but he's as mean as Dick Cheney. And just in case his over pronunciations confuse the constituency, he reminds you who he's running against: *"I don't parking lot pimp, I politic."* **HUA HSU**

DJ Whoo Kid & Peedi Crakk
Torture (Crakk Is Back)
MIX CD

Thought this was the one where Peedi Crakk rapped over Kings Of Pressure ("You Know How To Reach Us") who were big fans of Dr Anton Phibes, the tragic jazz organist/remote control brain squeeze toad helmet designer in the Captain Kangaroo wig, who allegedly perished in a car crash while en route to the hospital to see his ailing wife Victoria (aka Caroline Munro's) who starred with Peter "Dr Terror" Cushing in *At The Earth's Core*. So we drill. It must've been another mix CD, hopefully unseized by badgers who do not share our enthusiasm for Peedi's urchin memory of reciting Ultramagnetic while sitting on a toilet somewhere in North Philadelphia. Nor could they appreciate his beatbox version of "Criminology", as it appears here, reproducing Black Ivory with just a dental plan: plosives and saliva deserves a crified ribbon. But doing a remake of "Mona Lisa" is Old World and nearly quaint at this point, considering all that hilltop history available in Peedi's own town, though I imagine none would be more thrilled and more there, if those rumours of a Tuff Crew reunion at this year's NBA All-Star Game in Vegas were on the solidified side of things. **DAVE TOMPKINS**

Jazz & Improv Reviewed by Andy Hamilton

Dave Burrell
Momentum
HIGH TWO CD

Pianist Dave Burrell, born 1940, was prominent in the late 60s/70s free jazz scene, and later collaborated with David Murray. After 2004's *Expansion*, his first studio recording as leader for 30 years with William Parker and Andrew Cyrille, comes a second date. With bassist Michael Formanek and drummer Guillermo E Brown, Burrell offers six new compositions, three – "Downfall", "4.30 To Atlanta", "Broken Promise" – for the 1925 silent film *Body And Soul* starring Paul Robeson. Burrell is an avant garde traditionalist whose work I've enjoyed but never been sure how to assess. *Momentum* convinces: his touch and technique seem uneven and tentative – this is a question about whether they're always adequate to express his ideas, not a misapplication of classical standards. But here he creates something original from the ground between the darkly minimal curlicues of Mal Waldron and the Cecil Taylor influenced frenzy of Don Pullen. Formanek's virtuoso bass is an ideal foil and helps to create a great and very listenable release.

Stephen Crump
Rosetta
PAPILLON SOUNDS CD

An unusual string trio – Crump on bass, Liberty Ellman on acoustic guitar and Jamie Fox on electric guitar. It's an intriguing instrumental combination, and the soundworld they create is refreshing and original. That's partly down to the strikingly fresh compositions, which Crump wrote largely at home on a Fender Rhodes. "Kudzu" sets up a strong lyer-like groove, but mostly the pieces are more reflective and evanescent. The open, Country feel is most explicit on the haunting "Rosie". On "Our Survival", funk and Country come together.

Sidsel Endresen
One
SOFA CD

Although her background is in jazz improvisation, Norwegian Endresen's never been interested in scat singing. Over many years she has presented a body of solo vocalising with affinities to speech, documented on this disc. The first untitled track – like the wind whistling down the fjords – is atypical, although, like Kurt Schwitters and Jaap Blonk, she often focuses on particular spoken sounds. But unlike Schwitters's nonsense, which suggests meaning but frustrates the search for it, her vocalising often comes across like cut up or fragmentary speech. Intriguing and impressive.

Kieran Hebden & Steve Reid
Tongues
DOMINO CD

When they met in 2005, Kieran Hebden of Fridge and Four Tet was looking for the intense interaction of free jazz, while Reid thought that Hebden's electronic textures would make an excellent synthesis with jazz. Reid's technique is anchored in Elvin Jones and Art Blakey but he's always open to new influences. He made his recording debut in 1964 with Martha And The Vandellas, and he's worked with soul legends as well as studying percussion in West Africa. If the resulting *Exchange Sessions* were loose and exploratory, the duo's third release, recorded live at London's The Exchange in 2006 with no overdubs or edits, is more incisive, the shorter tracks revealing a clearer, more confident purpose. Hebden's multiple sampling uses a wide range of departure points, including (at Reid's suggestion) "Greensleeves", the song appropriated by John Coltrane, which gets a hauntingly fragmented interpretation here.

Gato Libre
Nomad
NO MAN'S LAND CD

Trumpeter Natsuki Tamura's Gato Libre, for which he writes all the music, features his wife Satoko Fujii (accordion), Kazuhiko Tsumura (guitar) and Norikatsu Koreyasu (bass). The sleevenotes say Gato Libre means "Stray (literally free) Cat", and the group consciously aim at a cooler ethos, though Tamura's trumpet is lyrically beautiful and commanding. Their first release, 2005's *Strange Village*, set the gentle, dreamy, folksih tone, and *Nomad* is more loosely based on folk influences. It suggests the European peregrinations which these itinerant musicians regularly undertake: Krakow, Glasgow, Paris, Barcelona and Madrid are included, and there's a suggestion of forms such as flamenco, tango, Scottish folk reels and Viennese waltz, and also reggae and blues, all of them filtered – inevitably and subtly – through a Japanese sensibility.

Frank Gratkowski & Misha Mengelberg
Frank Gratkowski Vis-a-vis Misha Mengelberg
LEO CD

Born in Hamburg in 1963, Frank Gratkowski studied at the conservatory there and in Cologne, and later with Charlie Mariano, Sal Nistico and Steve Lacy. Since 1992 he's worked in a duo with pianist Georg Graewe, but here he's found with veteran Improv maestro Misha Mengelberg, recorded on successive nights in 2005, in Mainz and Cologne. Gratkowski's instrumental mastery is clear from the "Geburtstags Mix", with himself on whimsical clarinet, "Gehockter Preis Mix" (on alto) and "Mix Digestiv" (on bass clarinet). His heart on sleeve expression goes well with Mengelberg's spontaneous subversion.

Giovanni Mirabessi
Canto Piano
MINTUK MUSIC CD

Paris based pianist Mirabessi's last appearance in this column was *Air*, an unusual trio disc from 2003 with Glenn Ferris and Flavio Boltro. This solo CD shows an even greater debt to fellow Italian master Enrico Pieranunzi – the resemblance is often uncanny – yet his playing is stronger for taking such a powerful model. "I give a lot of importance to the melody," Mirabassi comments. "Italian is a phonetic and singing language, and Italy is the country of the 'bel canto'; all these elements give us a natural sense of lyricism and construction." These quite beautiful original compositions are plangent and sometimes melancholic, but with an inner strength that belies any suggestion of sentimentality.

No Spaghetti Edition
Sketches Of A Fusion
SOFA CD

Founded by Tonny Kluften (bass), Ingar Zach (percussion) and Ivar Grydeland (stringed instruments), No Spaghetti Edition are an ensemble in permanent revolution. Since their foundation in 1998, more than 50 performers from European Improv, Norwegian jazz and contemporary music have participated. Their fourth release features, in addition to the founders, Christian Wallumrød on piano and Xavier Charles on clarinet and harmonica, and Martin Tétreault on record player and electronics. The superb recording captures the extreme dynamic and frequency spectrum with electronic and mechanical sources in compelling oscillation and fusion. The result is a rich and deep Improv exploration in which the acoustic instruments seem to lose their identity and become pure sound sources.

The Number
The Making Of Quiet Things
SLAM CD

Album title notwithstanding, this is magnificent, incandescent full-on free Improv with a strong melodic element, led by Gary Curson (alto sax) with Keith Tippett (piano), John Edwards (bass) and Mark Sanders (drums). Two members of Dreamtime – Curson and Tippett – meet two thirds of Evan Parker's regular group. Curson, born 1948, worked with Edwards before in Louis Moholo groups, and his playing has a visceral rawness and urgency. Compared to Dreamtime releases, fine though they are, this rhythm team produce a torrential effect, with tumultuous playing from Tippett. Two duets break up the ensembles with quieter playing. Producer Justin Paterson is sampling the recording to create new compositions, so the musicians were isolated to get acoustic separation. Listening over headphones without visual cues. This makes their achievement all the more remarkable.

Sherri Roberts
The Sky Could Send You
BLUE HOUSE CD

San Francisco vocalist Sherri Roberts studied with Sheila Jordan and, through her, met bassist and producer Harvie S – formerly Swartz, he got tired of the misspellings. There's a lot of Jordan in her lazy, behind-the-beat phrasing, and an eclectic background singing, reminiscent of Webern, Brecht and Sun Ra comes through in unusual interpretations of Jim Webb's "The Moon's A Harsh Mistress" and Bobby Troup's "You're Looking At Me". The highlight is the interpretation of Baden Powell's beautiful Latin composition "Lat Me". Harvie's compelling arrangements help to make this Roberts's finest release to date.

Roswell Rudd
Blown Bone
EMANEM CD

This extraordinary album features, for Emanem, unusually straight jazz. The core of the group is Rudd – imperious on trombone – Steve Lacy, bassist Wilbur Little and drummer Paul Motian. Separated by a previously unissued 1967 recording of "Long Hope", these two 1976 sessions are funky and loose. "It's Happening" is the first movement of a jazz suite written in 1974 and dedicated to Albert Ayler. "Blues For The Planet Earth" and "You Blew It", originally for symphonic wind band, are led here by vocalist Sheila Jordan. The title track is a jazz suite about New York, including the bizarre and engaging "Cement Blues", featuring veteran guitarist Louisiana Red, soulful tenor saxist Tyrone Washington and clarinettist Kenny Davern. The suite is closed by the African inflected funk of "Bethesda Fountain", the only recording by Jordan Steckel, a sculptor who built his own drums.

TYFT
Meg Nem Sa
SKIRL CD

Hilmar Jensson's electric power trio TYFT first appeared in 2002 on Songlines. Now on Chris Speed's new label Skirl, Jensson's crunch Metal guitar, Andrew D'Angelo's roughened, piercing alto sax and bass clarinet and Jim Black's drums and electronics explore a dark region between noise, punk and free jazz. D'Angelo's playing is as edgy and fiery as it is with Human Feel, and the minor-key compositions are some of the most forbidding you're likely to hear. "International Four" is essentially an energetic rock song, while "Tumble Bugs" is a towering noiscscape. The fusion of a jazz element can dilute the rawness of rock and noise, but here the rhythmic complexity and sophistication of jazz refines their power without diminishing it. Musically there's so much going on – an original and really extraordinary release.

Gebhard Ullman
Basement Research
Live In Munster
NOT TWO/WDR CD

Awesome heavy duty new jazz from the German saxophonist, now in his 50th year. This tough tenor quartet, recorded in 1995, is his regular working group. The compositions are originals, all – I assume – by Ullman. "New No Ness" is a characteristically angular composition, which opens with the leader on soprano, sparring with his partner's thick-toned tenor. Malaby's solo which follows begins with a dark exploration of the instrument's lower register before rising to ecstatic heights – the tone gorgeously, majestically distinctive. Ullman's soprano is, I think, more appealing than his tenor, for instance in the quirky duet with Gress on this track. □

Outer Limits Reviewed by Ken Hollings

Absolut Null Punkt
Metacompound
IMPORTANT CD

Unimaginative production values ensure that the first studio album from KK Null and Seijiro Murayama since they initially went their separate ways in 1987 is hardly likely to cause real excitement. The drums have been mixed up pretty much the same way throughout the three workouts contained here, remaining stuck somewhere in the middle distance while Null's electronics occupy most of the foreground. The intense creative interplay between this fearless duo was captured with greater fidelity on their *Live In Japan* album recorded at the time of their initial reunion.

Bass Communion
Loss
SOLEILNOON CD

Steve Wilson's newest release retains distinct echoes of his previous Bass Communion work *Ghosts On Magnetic Tape* which, he states, "relates to electronic voice phenomena, or the idea that the dead can still communicate with the living world through recorded media". *Loss* concerns itself with the nostalgic recollections of those still trapped among the living on this side of the great divide, delicately evoked by the desolate tolling of an upright piano, the high shimmering tones of a vibraphone and the crackling run off groove of an old 78 rpm record. Packaged as a memorial album complete with formal Victorian portraits of the recently departed, it also comes in a 5.1 surround sound version on DVD audio disc, so you can feel their absence all around you.

Anla Courtis & Dylan Nyoukis
Fight The Pyramids
CHOCOLATE MONK CD-R

By anyone's standards, this hardly seems a fair contest. Have you seen what kind of condition the Pyramids are in these days? They wouldn't stand a chance. Freelance noise merchants Anla Courtis and Dylan Nyoukis, taking time out from their Reynols and Blood Stereo/Decoer Pinga projects respectively, sat up a little trilateral trade that sees them turning in a solo track each before combining for a live finale. "Algarrobima Solida" from Courtis grinds and rumbles along, a sombre exercise in monotony, while Nyoukis goes for warm tones, random incursions and accidental harmonies on "Spiritual Mould". None of these qualities are much in evidence on their meandering untitled collaboration, recorded in Brighton during last summer. Next time pick on someone your own size.

Dead Voices On Air
From Labrador To Madagascar
INVISIBLE CD

After time spent serving in the company of Zoviet*France and Download, as well as a stint alongside veteran seafarers Can on their 30th anniversary performances, Mark Spybey is now blessed with an internal compass whose needle is always pointing south. Even without a specific place name to indicate its destination, each track on his latest studio release as Dead Voices On Air has a powerful inbuilt sense of direction. Preserved by distance, they maintain an enigmatic sense of becalmed isolation, like the tattered fragments of old sea charts or dusty rows of specific jars filled with soil samples and pieces of dried vegetation. All you have to do is follow his drift.

Don Limpio
Stuck To The Roof Of My Mouse
GRAND DECEIVER CD

Anyone who thinks the title for this first album from New York's Grand Deceiver sucks in the grand manner should wait until they see its cover art: a better display of rotten eye candy you're unlikely to encounter for some time... Based in South Korea, visual design wonk Sherwin Jones, aka Don Limpio, likes to plays fast and loose with 8-bit sounds, cramming as many blips, riffs and blasts into the shortest possible time, rocking up all of 37 tracks in the process. This may owe less to the high velocity intricacies contained within each individual composition than it does to his passion for coming up with screwy new titles. There are, in fact, 37 of them – and they all suck.

Formication
The Untitled Wasdale Recordings
NO LABEL CD

Although undoubtedly derived from the correct technical term for attempting sexual congress with an ant, you have to admit that sonic occultists Alec Bowman and Kingsley Ravenscroft have chosen a magnificent name for themselves. Their latest project, available as a download or part of a limited edition box set, documents three days of secret recordings made in a remote location in the Lake District. Best appreciated as one long alchemical rite rather than as individual performances, their work commences with the opening up of a piano's internal mechanics and concludes in an endless reverberation caught in the act of constantly renewing itself – a wellspring of ritual sound.

Bernhard Günter & Heribert Friedl
Trans
NONVISUAL OBJECTS CD

Starting with a set of field recordings made in the vicinity of three small power transformers in which various overtones were captured by careful repositioning of the microphone, Bernhard Günter, on electric cellotar, homemade bamboo flute and three vintage harmonicas, is joined by Heribert Friedl on amplified cymbalon to further explore their harmonic range. What emerges is a gently shifting but tightly controlled meditation on modulation and change that knows how and when to hold its own peace.

Samuel Jeronimo
Rima
THISCO CD

In order to circumvent the rather windy modernist rhetoric of Jerónimo's accompanying remarks, it's enough to note that he links musical experimentation to late 19th century poetics through the word "rima", being the Portuguese for rhyme. It's an intriguing concept, as the four discrete pieces that constitute *Rima* amply demonstrate. A rhyme can never exist as anything less than two separate events that are rhythmically linked, which is to say, by a specifically anticipated form of repetition. To this extent, the sustained periods of "Verso 1" are reflected as a variation in "Verso 3" and the jaunty fugue for organ that makes up "Verso 2" becomes a foursquare chorale in "Verso 4". All explanations aside, Jerónimo handles his endeavour both neatly and effectively.

Luasa Raalon
Season Of The Witch
SNIP SNIP CD

David Reed, aka Luasa Raalon, creates industrial music that is all decay and very little attack. Opening cut "Cursed" picks up where his *Poison City* left off, its component sounds fading in and out of some dark distance, where the muffled pounding that follows on "Strike The Hour" seems to indicate something even darker is taking place. The remaining tracks tend to come at the listener from equally odd angles, positioning themselves ominously, as if wishing to comment obliquely on the kind of activities that are best kept off camera, hidden in the shadows or discreetly left to the individual's imagination.

Mattin
Songbook, Vol 4
AZUL DISCOGRAFICA CD

Mattin could probably write a very nice song if he chose to, but it's probably better for everyone that he doesn't. Instead he makes up stuff and records it straight into his Thinkpad 142 laptop, using its constricted internal microphone to pick up his singing, along with some guitars and a couple of people down the hall shouting and playing sax together in the toilet. Mattin really makes you not want to care. He takes things seriously so you don't have to: *"I know you cannot survive any of my desires"* he intones at one particularly intense moment in the session, which took place somewhere in Tokyo last summer. He doesn't have to tell you twice.

Metal Dungeon
Cells
TIME STEREO CD

There are no titles, the tracks all run together and the cover looks like it was designed using a spray can and a couple of crude stencils, but what's not to love about the sequel to Wade Kergan and Devin Brennan's speaker busting *Grade* release? This Detroit duo has an overloaded circuit board and they're going to use it. Fans of the kind of crappy reverb you get on cheap amps just before they start picking up minicab messages are in for a real good time. They may well be the last kids on the block to appreciate that, even in the digital age, the effect becomes the content, but as Tommy Ramone once remarked: "What did you expect? Flugelhorns?"

Nokalypsa
Ocean Of Inexistence
TRIPLE BATH CD

The first release from Themis Pantelopoulos on his own Athens based start up label is so micromanaged that each of the five main tracks has been further subdivided into smaller subtitled sections. The result is an uneven collection of passages that, while arresting in themselves, lack focus and direction when taken together. The neatly stacked percussion on "Underred" and some fuzz toned acid rhythms neatly separated out in the mix of "Cerrera" make you wish Pantelopoulos would cut loose a little more often. As it is, the emphasis on build up over climax, together with a weakness for infinitely withheld momentum, means that much of the best work on *Ocean Of Inexistence* ends up languishing somewhere between the faintly discernible and the barely audible.

Claudio Parodi
Horizontal Mover (Homage To Alvin Lucier)
EXTREME CD

Using Alvin Lucier's 1970 composition *I Am Sitting In A Room* as a starting point, Parodi creates an investigative sound piece in which all structure has been removed and only the process remains. Unfortunately, it's impossible to tell from his notes quite what that might have entailed. There's some talk of diffusers, resonators and hummers, plus a list of equipment including percussion instruments and amplifiers, but no clear account of the stages involved. Even the object of Parodi's homage seems somewhat perplexed: "I will have to reread your description of the process to more fully understand it," Lucier writes in a short letter of appreciation reproduced on the back cover before adding that he also finds the work "absolutely beautiful".

Social Interiors
Spatial Circumference
ENDGAME CD

The fourth release by the Social Interiors collective was mastered for release in 1995 by Australia's Extreme label but got bumped from the schedules in favour of a 50 CD *Merzbow* box set. But *Spatial Circumstance* has been worth the wait. Each of the three main members have produced a solo track apiece mixing and manipulating field recordings into impossible acoustic environments. On "Things Change Things Remain The Same", Rik Rue pays tribute to the North African terrain explored in the writings of Paul Bowles and Bryon Gysin. Shane Fahey's "Mound Of Mounds" delves into the native Australian bush, and Julian Knowles uses resonators to explore the singing long wire art of Alan Lamb. Finally all three of them collaborate on the title piece, a surround sound montage featuring coastal and rainforest sounds. Don't leave it so long next time, guys. ☐

The Inner Sleeve Artwork selected this month by Vaughan Oliver

Jonathan Richman & The Modern Lovers
Jonathan Richman & The Modern Lovers
BESERKLEY
DESIGN & ARTWORK BY PAUL BEVOIR

For some reason this simple sleeve still resonates with me some 30 years after I bought the album and I'd like to know why. Considering that it goes against all my own principles of sleeve design I'm doubly curious. One, it's a portrait, two, it doesn't reflect the music and three, the designer was away that week. But maybe that's essentially it. It holds a perverse attraction for me. Then again it does the same thing for others without such high falutin principles.

It's one of a handful of albums in my collection where the musician has decided to let you know what he looks like and has the gall to stare at you from the front cover. I don't normally go in for that kind of thing. "What vanity!" "How totally unimaginative!" That's not to say that a portrait can't be deeply engaging, it's just that you don't get that kind of portrait on album sleeves. Usually.

Well, this very painterly photograph of Jonathan Richman by Fabian Bachrach really does something for me and actually is at such odds with the naively charismatic songs inside that it concerns me. You might easily expect to find this sleeve racked alongside some romantic 80s Euro pop or nestling in a neighbourly fashion by a young Julio Iglesias. But it's got more to it than a harlot's tousled hairdo and clean white open-necked shirt. It's got more to it than homoerotic overtones and a blue sky backdrop. I'm getting Italian Renaissance. I'm getting biblical, I'm getting John The Baptist. If Nick Cave had a nerve, it could be him. Perhaps it's the skin tones, perhaps it's Jonathan's eyes. So sensitive that he appears to be on the edge of tears the whole time. And it has a duality of tone that arrests me. Something tortured, something bubblegum that raises this big curlicue of a question mark, which has hooked itself into my consciousness and remained unpicked for as long as I've been looking at this sleeve. I can't condone the poor typography and the lazy back sleeve. As a 'designed' package it's very poor but as an enigmatic portrait of a unique artist it hits the spot. It's gorgeous. And, you know, 30 years later, it's also very modern. ☐

Graphic designer Vaughan Oliver's v23 posters are on show in Slightly Off The Ground, Stanley Picker Gallery, Kingston, London until 3 March

Print Run New music books: devoured, dissected, dissed

Don Letts in Jamaica with John Lydon

...and Bob Marley

Culture Clash: Dread Meets Punk Rockers
Don Letts with David Nobakht
SAF PUBLISHING HBK £16.99

Well known as the catalyst for punk rock's fruitful obsession with Jamaican music, Don Letts could hardly be described as an unsung hero. Still, as a self-made polymath – DJ, video director, documentarian, musician, cultural commentator and friend to the stars – his story remains one that cries out to be told.

Co-written by Letts and David Nobakht, *Culture Clash: Dread Meets Punk Rockers* does exactly that, charting the subject's life from his birth in South London as one of the first generation of British-born black kids, to working at the epicentre of London's burgeoning fashion scene, witnessing the rallying cry of The Sex Pistols, The Slits, X-Ray Spex and many more as both observer and participant, then subsequently travelling the world with camera in hand...

Over 217 pages, more or less dictated to Nobakht and written verbatim, Letts's voice is both distinctive and engaging. Boisterous depictions of his childhood involving a near drowning, neighbourhood squabbles and a passion for performing public experiments (including an attempt to send "the first insects into space") are hilarious and touching. Meanwhile the accounts of punk's evolution bring the whole era to life on the page.

Get halfway through, though, and the conversational memoir style begins to wear thin. Where repetition and nonsequiturs have their place in speech, print is way less forgiving a medium. Letts's maxim that a "good idea attempted is better than a bad idea perfected" and his wont for "turning problems into assets", for instance, are right at the heart of this autobiography. We know because he tells us endlessly.

All the same, Letts is extraordinarily honest in every sense, making no claims to literary greatness and concentrating instead on laying down a breathless sequence of firsthand anecdotes, from his close friendship with The Clash to his first forays into film making, hanging out with Grandmaster Flash to shooting promos for Musical Youth and hair Metallers Ratt.

As visceral as the sketches of 1970s England are, and as urgently as punk's DIY revolution is portrayed, Letts truly comes alive when he's talking about reggae and his frequent visits to its island home. Describing the way Jamaican culture has colonised the wider British consciousness, from the Trojan labels ska and rocksteady heyday to contemporary dancehall, describing the work of artists including Culture, U-Roy and Burning Spear as "musical reportage", recognising the sound system as a discursive space where information is imparted "spiritually, politically, culturally", his observations are at their most lucid and incisive.

One visit to Kingston (accompanying John Lydon on his famous trip as Virgin Records reggae consultant) becomes a voyage of personal discovery, the narrator at once getting in touch with his roots and coming to terms with his own distance from them, while hanging out with Bob Marley in London eventually led to the song "Punky Reggae Party" being written.

Throughout, Letts's sense of assurance and confidence in his own place within the world – outsider and insider by equal measure – is inspiring. Despite expressing a somewhat unfair disdain for contemporary reggae as "morally bankrupt" and viewing the rise of digital dancehall as the beginning of the end, the closing chapter rounds off with Letts expressing the kind of satisfaction and ease that come when life is lived well and to the full. He has every right to sit back and enjoy the view now, too. After all, this is a guy who has seen more and done more in 50 years than many of us even dare to dream of.

DAVE STELFOX

The Music Of Mauricio Kagel
Björn Heile
ASHGATE HBK £50

Argentinean born, Cologne based composer Mauricio Kagel has long deserved an English language book about his music, and Björn Heile's study goes some way to filling that niche. If this doesn't sound like a complete endorsement, then that's partly the fault of his publishers – a slim 174 pages of text for a career as varied and multifarious as this inevitably cuts corners (especially given Heile's stated desire to discuss every Kagel opus) while production values are of the 'no expense spent' variety. Faintly scanned music examples and a handful of grainy photographs let the side down badly, and given available technologies this cutback was surely avoidable.

Heile, however, writes with his heart largely in the right place, and expresses a genuine love for his subject. Naturally, there are opinions and perspectives that one disagrees with. When he's exploring the knotty issues around where Kagel fits in the modernism/postmodernism spectrum, he stumbles headfirst into Blairite spin that stops just short of hailing him as 'The People's Composer'. "younger composers, having been brought up on jazz and pop as well as diverse forms of concert music ... trained perhaps in a Baroque ensemble or a gamelan orchestra, perhaps being of non Western origin, have more choices to make. All identities are constructed and in contemporary multiethnic society, there is a confusing diversity of building materials for this construction..." You sort of know what Heile is getting at, but Kagel never drops into styles like a dilettante, rather he subverts and mediates between them. This reads uncomfortably like rudimentary cultural relativism.

Heile's exploration of young Mauricio growing up in Buenos Aires is more enlightening. Kagel's obsession with film evolved quickly, and when he worked as an extra for the SAOE studios he appeared alongside the actress Eva Duarte, later known as Evita Perón. Jorge Luis Borges, Kagel's English professor, also left a legacy on his work, although Kagel underplayed it when I interviewed him for *The Wire* 232. But Heile reveals the complex correlation between Borges's absurdist logic and Kagel's own labyrinths.

His arrival in Cologne in 1957 was, of course, the turning point for Kagel. He had arrived in the city of Stockhausen and Ligeti and Heile astutely unravels Kagel's affiliation to serial orthodoxies. Although intellectually stimulated by the theories of serialism, Kagel quickly upended its principles by provoking chaos rather than Stockhausen type control. By extending 12 tone thinking to language in his 1958 *Anagrama*, Kagel trashes linguistic syntax, adding a surreal melt to the serial soundworld. As Kagel's music evolves into the satirical persona he adopted in the 1970s, Heile's tendency is to emphasise the 'fun' aspects of his scores. Other commentators will always find the darker core of these same pieces more intriguing – but every fan of his music invents their own Mauricio Kagel.

PHILIP CLARK

Christof Migone: Trou
Nicole Gingras & Christof Migone
GALERIE DE L'UQAM HBK+DVD $35

As Nicole Gingras writes in her introduction to the work of Montréal based installation and sound artist Christof Migone, the body is "a text ... the raw material that the artist works with, that he cuts into fragments, transforms, manipulates". In this he bears at least some comparison with Antonin Artaud, though Artaud's performative expressiveness (a philosophically validated howl of existential pain) has little to do with the invasive procedures to which Migone subjects himself and others. His subjects' acquiescence does little to allay this troubling aspect, yet there's nothing in his writing, nor Gingras's exegesis, that acknowledges it.

Trou comprises an overview of his work from 1995–2006. Much of the book – a substantial and elegantly produced catalogue of 22 key works – consists of photographic stills of his installations. In themselves they convey little of what it must feel like to experience the installations in situ, but Gingras's essay and Migone's explanatory texts (both presented in English and French) add a useful layer of meaning, and the 30 minute DVD of five of the installations presents them to better advantage.

One of the pieces on the DVD, *Poker* (2001) – a reference, I assume, to maintaining a 'poker face', ie to remain inexpressive – uses a split screen technique. Microphones of various kinds are stroked over and tapped onto the faces of volunteers. The faces in each of the dual frames change at irregular intervals, and the sounds vary according to whether a cheekbone is being tapped or an eyebrow stroked. About halfway through the piece there's a snatch of a field recording of adults and children, low volume, lo-fi and vague the significance of which is obscure. For *P* (2006), Migone recorded the sound of himself saying "pee" every time he urinated. There are 1000 tightly packed, chronologically sequenced utterances in the piece, which took 149 days to record. As well as the 60 second DVD version, there is, apparently, also a 60 minute version. While Migone repeatedly says "pee", the letter P dances around the screen. It's an amusing piece, but of little consequence. What's of greater importance, but acknowledged by the artist only in *Poker*, is how aspects of his work reduce people to the status of things to which things may be done. It hardly matters whether his subjects have agreed to be treated in this way: the result is dehumanising, which I suspect is not what Migone wishes to convey.

BRIAN MARLEY

The Show I'll Never Forget: 50 Writers Relive Their Most Memorable Concertgoing Experience
Sean Manning (Editor)
DA CAPO PBK £9.99

The title of this collection of essays by primarily American writers, including the likes of Chuck Klosterman and Nirvana biographer Charles R Cross, is somewhat ironic. The memories of gigs past may glow fondly like candles in the nether regions of the mind, but the light they shed is generally a bit weak. That's to say, unless you were reviewing the concert and the notes you made were extensive and preserved, one's recollections are going to be hazy at best, utterly mistaken at worst – certainly barely adequate for the purposes of a full-blown essay. This isn't so much of a problem for Luc Sante, who witnessed Public Image Ltd at New York's Ritz in 1981 – he was able to smuggle in a cumbersome tape recorder in the days when no one much bothered with bag searches. However, many of these accounts, including Ishmael Reed's vague and slightly inconsequential account of seeing Miles Davis in 1955, the highlight of which is Davis failing to be truculent to the author, contain little sense of the performances they revolve around. David Gates, meanwhile, recalling the concert James Brown gave the night after Martin Luther King was murdered, is strong on the white-hot sociopolitical significance of the event and James Brown's role as pacifier/beacon of black pride but, as he frankly admits, "I don't remember any of the songs, nor even what songs were played".

Doesn't necessarily matter. Many of these essays are more reminiscent of *The Wire's* own Epiphanies column, in which keynote gigs represent rites of passage, some sort of validation or consolatory affirmation perhaps. Despite the diversity of groups and acts represented in this collection, whose spectrum reaches all the way to Queen, Rush, Mink DeVille and Bruce Springsteen, there's a common, often self-deprecating, autobiographical feel to these pieces. Richard Burgin's memories of meeting Bill Evans are amusingly solipsistic. He reveals, in rather one sided detail, a meeting with the pianist in which he pours out his soul to him about a recent break-up. Evans's only contribution to the dialogue is "Did she DO?" Burgin, who as a teenager cold-called the jazz greats living in New York on their listed numbers, is so caught up in his own awe he can remember very little of what his heroes are actually saying to him.

Nor are they always laudatory. Sante's aforementioned account of PiL is soaked in disappointment, even derision as the group mock, goad, even threaten their audience of largely ex-punks, embarking on an ill conceived, mixed-media experience featuring tentative rock improv and film. For Sante, PiL in this instance represent not a transcendence but a betrayal of punk, in their pissing from de haut en bas hostility, re erecting barriers between performer and the people. Under the circumstances, it's a fair point.

Perhaps the funniest of these pieces, another example of the supplementary anecdote becoming the main event, is David Ritz's account of himself as a cub reporter who lucks into an interview with bluesman Jimmy Reed. The great man invites him into the back of his car, along with a glamorous young female companion, breaks out a flask of whiskey and asks Ritz to fire away. However, before he can begin, Reed and his girlfriend erupt into a lovers' row which quickly involves razorblades, long fingernails and a trip to the nearest A&E department, from which they eventually emerge, bandaged and holding hands.

Among the best writing here is that where the concertgoer has been made as writer as in the case of jazz journalist Gary Giddens. He's masterly in his recollection of the Titans Of The Tenor! festival in New York in 1986, whether decrying the venue, which had "all the acoustic nuance of a gymnasium", or comparing John Coltrane's use of "My Favorite Things" with the way Boris Karloff used to wiggle his little finger at frightened co star Mae Clarke when in full Frankenstein's monster make-up, as if to say "It's only me". Of course, the collective force of Coltrane et al washed through Giddens like a fiery purge which he evokes vividly. "Afterward, nothing musical could frighten me."

DAVID STUBBS

On Screen Films & DVDs

alva noto & Ryuichi Sakamoto
Insen Live
RASTER NOTON DVD

If art really aspires to the condition of music as Walter Pater claimed, why is there such a strong tradition of artists attempting to verify or translate their music into visual analogues? Xenakis's *Polytopes* being just one grandly ambitious example. In Pater's scheme of things this kind of attempt must be aesthetically anti aspirational: a kind of deliberate slumming it down amongst the messiness of the non musical. One response is synaesthesia, the neurological phenomenon in which the brain rewires sense data, so that sounds are experienced as colours. If eye and ear control can so easily overlap, why assume you can rule music and visuals apart so distinctly?

The visuals are a major part of *Insen Live*. Ryuichi Sakamoto and alvanoto (aka Carsten Nicolai) have been collaborating since 2003's *Vrioon*, with Nicolai in an editorial role, taking delivery of Sakamoto's sparse, reflective piano recordings and processing them to provide subtly atmospheric counterpoints. This disc documents the pair working in real time, using the themes from 2005's *Insen*, with the addition of a large scale screen which pulses, blinks, glows and fizzes with images generated from the music.

They work well, but the problem is seeing them. The performances are recorded with the austerity you might expect from Raster Noton, usually comprising a long, static single shot which just about fits both musicians. The screen itself is a long thin strip, which alva noto, in an appended interview, describes as a bridge between the two performers. But its ratio means it takes up only a fraction of the shot. As a result it's all too easy for the viewer to disengage from the screen and end up just listening, which rather defeats the purpose of the DVD format.

The music is still fascinating. Sakamoto's playing is a lesson in timing and phrasing, with each note and chord wonderfully weighted. Nicolai's understated electronics provide punctuating clicks and extended shades which never crowd the space between Sakamoto's clusters. Sakamoto in turn feeds off Nicolai's tone, so that, as Rob Young's liner notes point out, it ceases to be clear who intervenes on who. Perhaps duo exchanges like this, which bring the acoustic/analogue and electronic/digital most directly into opposition (see also Steve Reid and Kieran Hebden), are the best way to integrate the two? Sakamoto and Nicolai manage it brilliantly.

SAM DAVIES

Ryuichi Sakamoto & Alva Noto

Quay Brothers' *Street Of Crocodiles* (1986)

Quay Brothers
The Short Films 1979–2003
BFI 2xDVD

This superb, lavishly packaged collection gathers the bulk of the Quay Brothers' short films in remastered and restored form, bundling them together with a second disc of 'footnotes' and a dictionary booklet. Identical twins Stephen and Timothy Quay (pronounced kway) were born in Philadelphia but have been based in London for many years. Though they trained as illustrators and have worked in opera and theatre design and directed commercials, the Quays are best known for their short films. They've also directed two mostly live action feature films: 1995's somnolent, sepulchral *Institute Benjamenta* and *The Piano Tuner Of Earthquakes* (2004), a limpid Gothic fantasia.

The intensely self contained world of the Quays is as easy to recognise as it is hard to describe. Their films are populated by string animated puppets who wander in balletic stop motion through dreamworlds, subterranean tableaux and parallel realities, enacting mysterious rituals and nightmarish deeds. Crammed with allusions and orbiting around arcane metaphors, their fastidiously conceived dioramas and sometimes deliberately crude animation contrast vividly with the Brothers' free associative thought processes and vivid imaginative play.

The films often loosely adapt or cryptically refer to fairy tales, or literary works by authors – Franz Kafka, Bruno Schulz and Robert Walser – crop up repeatedly – who typify the early 20th century Mittaleuropean sensibility in which their oeuvre is so thoroughly steeped. In the near complete absence of human characters and dialogue, the soundtracks – mostly composed by regular collaborators Larry Sider and Leszek Jankowski – play an important narrative function, by turns driving, commenting on and undercutting the events.

The Quays have undertaken commissions for MTV and directed two videos for His Name Is Alive (both included here), but their most significant musical collaboration was with Karlheinz Stockhausen on the astonishing, unsettling *In Absentia* (2000). It interspersed prismic refractions of light with heavily coded references to outsider artists Emma Hauck and Adolf Wölfli, spinning a distorted representation of mental pathology while Stockhausen's soundtrack builds into an impressively unpleasant barrage.

It's one of many highlights on a package which bursts with wonders. *This Unnameable Little Broom* (1985), *Street Of Crocodiles* (1986) and *Rehearsals For Extinct Anatomies* (1987) are as timelessly brilliant as ever, and two films which originated as commissions reveal as much about the Quays as their ostensible subjects. *The Phantom Museum* (2003) is both a trawl through US philanthropist Henry Wellcome's collection of medical artefacts and a tour of the Quays' fetishes, and *Anamorphosis* (1991), doubles as a guide to medieval painting technique and gnomic self analysis.

NICK CAIN

Semiconductor
Worlds In Flux
FATCAT DVD

Never mind global warming. What would it be like to actually live on the surface of the sun? *Brilliant Noise* on Semiconductor's new collection of films takes us in as close as we'll probably ever get. This stunning six minute black and white film is assembled from the data archives of several solar observatories; we could be staring through an aeroplane window at a seething inferno of sunspot activity. Fiery fronds wriggle around a black tunnel like a jellyfish composed of gas, and an escaping plume shoots out of a cauldron like a leaping trout. It's hard to sense the scale here – Semiconductor are animators, so maybe this was filmed over a kitchen stove? But no, it's all raw solar footage, and as you watch it repeatedly you can select from 12 commissioned soundtracks by Iris Garrelfs, Thomas Ormuzio, Max Richter and others. These are incredible images, and at first it seems that no sound could be vast enough to accompany them. Robert Hampson and Antenna Farm (Alastair Leslie and EatCat's own David Howell) both hit on the right blend of harshness and menacing messiness. Semiconductor, active since 1999, are Brighton based Ruth Jarman and Joseph Gerhardt. A theme running through their DVD is sound as the driving force of animation. For their music video *200 Nanowebbers*, Double Adaptor's soundtrack is what jerks Semiconductor's abstract landscape into life. The music's banshee electronics are converted into 3D objects, dancing in an ominous grey light as if on the verge of a thunderstorm. *All The Time In The World* starts from data recordings in the archives of a geological survey. In a witty play on the malleability of data, this information about seismic disturbance is translated into a soundtrack of subterranean rumblings, which then appears to send shudders through a film of the Northumbrian landscape. Soon the moorland is bouncing like a waterbed.

There's plenty of artistic seriousness here but Semiconductor never lose touch with their animator's funny bones. Sometimes it's just the tight synching of sound to image – the hectically expanding cityscape of *Inaudible Cities* is tinged with humour as a fierce ripping sound causes the buildings to sprout a sudden layer of vents. *Mini Epochs* is an exquisite set of one minute films about the vulnerability of the city of Venice. Here the absurd and the poignant merge in a miniature story: tiny orange towers pop up around a rapidly drying puddle.

My favourite is *The Sound Of Microclimates*, filmed in Paris for a surround sound installation. This is animation as ambiguity – is this cloud really hovering over the building? Why is there an iceberg in the municipal pond? Semiconductor's surly electronic soundtrack suggests a sci-fi distortion of the everyday city: tall at dusk the glowing lights of the traffic detach themselves and flock like birds. In a moment of great beauty they swarm across Paris to nestle between skyscrapers, jiggling as if crammed into a discotheque for off duty tail-lights.

CLIVE BELL

Sound Space

SOUTH HILL PARK ARTS CENTRE
BRACKNELL UK

As mobile phones and noise cancelling headphones are locked in a sonic arms race on buses across the world there's a greater need than ever for fresh forms of engagement with sound This day long symposium which features voices from both within and without the sometimes stuffy confines of institutional art, is itself located at an artificial sanctuary of sorts – a digital media centre housed in an old country mansion nestled between the motorways and roundabouts of one of the many concrete new towns built in the 1960s

The relationship between the listener and listening conditions between thought and sound is the very essence of sound art so hearing the ideas behind projects is often as compelling as the results themselves. Janek Schaefer's work is a case in point. His debut, *Recorded Delivery* consisted of a voice activated tape recorder being sent through the mail, revealing bored postal workers boasting of their sexual exploits and delivery men hustling to get the package safely to its destination.

This brilliantly simple idea which apparently Brian Eno admitted wishing he'd dreamt up first, effortlessly penetrated the hidden spaces – warehouses goods yards and reception desks – that make up the engine room of London commerce An equally elegant proposition is Schaefer's installation *Vacant Space*, on site at the South Hill Park arts complex over the winter The room is empty save for a video wall, which pans slowly through mysteriously empty interiors, accompanied on headphones by a tight mesh of magnified Ambient noise Observing and hearing these spaces without their usual hustle and bustle is as psychologically liberating as running through the aisles of a supermarket after closing time Another longterm resident in the gallery spaces is John Stokes's installation *Pop, Skip And Jump 3*, where a battered record on perpetually locked groove has slowly degraded to a strangely reassuring hum and crackle

Schaefer is the first speaker today, giving a breathless presentation of his many projects past and present Whatever the bent of some of his works, it's clear his primary muse is the mind boggling multiplicity of everyday sound His prolific work rate suggests an attempt to collect natural sonic marvels in the manner of Noah filling his ark, and an hour in his company is enough to persuade anyone of Ambient sound's potential to engage the open mind Archaeologist Aaron Watson concentrates on the seldom discussed qualities of rural ambience Expounding upon the unique sonic features – stone reflectors earthly amplifiers – of various ancient sites in England and Scotland, he bounds around the stage as if he's been digging for hidden treasure The discussion suggested a vital addendum to Spinal Tap's Stonehenge problem – even if you could build your polystyrene replica of the monument to the correct dimensions, it still wouldn't match the imposing stone timbre of the original. Resonance FM's Ed Baxter delivered a presentation that was even more ambitious packing an entire

John Stokes's *Pop Skip And Jump 3*

aesthetic history of broadcasting into an hour of argument and enigmatic prerecorded audio skits Arguing that the pigeonholing tendencies of Podcasts and downloads threaten the shared chronology that unites radio audiences, his discourse pertained as much to the nature of cultural memory as radio itself When a broadcaster can create this inspired synthesis of Chris Marker and BBC Radio 4's *Thought For The Day* it's shameful that Resonance FM's financial future remains under constant threat.

After such eclectic discussions, a panel session musing on various definitions of sound art seemed to carry little relevance outside the funding practicalities of the UK arts scene Happily the evening performances provided much needed musical relief Schaefer performed an astonishingly intimate set of turntable manipulations and sculpted delays in a recital room Kodoê then shook the basement with an hour of beatless enveloping bass vibrations, with vocalist Spaceape employing a dub poetic whisper rather than his usual Prince Far I drawl Sound Space may not have managed to trace the precise contours of sound art as a contemporary art form but its wealth of ideas and performances showcased a host of ways to engage with sound that fall wholly outside the audio pollution of the everyday

DEREK WALMSLEY

Sam Ashley and Joan La Barbara performing *Concrete*

STEPHANIE SEGER (ASHLEY)

Robert Ashley
Concrete

LA MAMA ETC ANNEX
NEW YORK USA

If the world is round, why do all the buildings line up so neatly? Why do so many human pastimes – baseball horse racing and figure skating, for instance though not poker – move in a counterclockwise direction? Those are some of the more ephemeral questions pondered in Robert Ashley's latest opera *Concrete*, presented in New York City in January A more fundamental question went unstated, but was present all the same How does an ageing artist retired from the regular grind of a daytime job fill the hours in a day?

Earlier Ashley operas grappled with the big issues history philosophy, religion symbolised through the interaction of iconic characters who lingered from one work to the next. Just lately, however, he has been far more interested in marginalised figures on the outskirts of everyday society In *Dust* (1998) Ashley dealt with the rambling observations of homeless people who lived outside the door of his Lower Manhattan apartment. *Celestial Excursions* (2003) was based on the temporally adrift recollections of elderly people he encountered in Arizona and elsewhere

Concrete continues that tendency, but with a surprising twist its true subject is Ashley himself That isn't stated outright at any point, of course, but to anyone with a working knowledge of his music it's eminently clear The opera reflects Ashley's present status that of an ageing creator with a lot of time on his hands Ensemble numbers detail the minutiae of rambling internal debates while four lengthy solos tell the stories of old friends each of whom harbour an unsuspected secret, in some cases a rather dangerous one

Ashley's cast features four idiosyncratic vocalists who've been performing his operas for decades son Sam Ashley, Thomas Buckner Jacqueline Humbert and Joan La Barbara Where *Concrete* breaks with Ashley's past work was in the degree of liberty he afforded his performers This time there's no click track, no assigned pitches instead the singers are guided by a script, a set and the weight of accumulated experience in Ashley's idiom.

Backed by Ashley's electronic orchestra – a bed of electronic crackles whooshes and throbs improvised on a laptop computer from a platform set high above the performers and audience – the vocalists gab in a sort of Sprechstimme that swings considerably more loosely than in Ashley's earlier clockwork constructions Seated at an elongated gambling table fashioned by designer David Moodey, they shuffle oversized cards on which their lines are printed delivering the words in Ashley's affected, lyrical conception of American vernacular speech Abstract patterns of light and computer animation play overhead on a long black backdrop

Setting *Concrete* in a casino proved appropriate two of the old friends whose stories Ashley set in lengthy solo monologues are professional gamblers, while two more pursue equally risky vocations The greatest gamble ultimately is Ashley's own since his method leaves so much to chance And while it's true that the rigorous construction of his earlier works is felt and sometimes missed Ashley's bet is ultimately on the money thanks to generous interpreters who make this trip inside his skull a cosy illuminating journey

STEVE SMITH

Incapacitants

Birchville Cat Motel

Metsol

On Location Live and kicking: festivals, concerts, events in the flesh

All Ears Festival

VARIOUS VENUES
OSLO NORWAY

Conceived as a festival in which all shades of improvised music are allowed an equal platform, Oslo's All Ears is proving to be one of the most important events in the musical calendar. Now in its sixth year, its programming of local and international musicians, young turks and established artists side by side creates an environment that seems to bring the best out of all those involved. And judging by the packed houses on all four days, there's a growing audience for adventurous music in this part of the world.

Kicking off the festival, Khan are a tight, dynamic free rock troupe in the Mouthus vein with the low tuned guitar of Stein Westerhus in particular sounding very similar to the sludgy roar produced by that group's Brian Sullivan. They are less surefooted when trying their hand at the kind of unison slamming that Boredoms and Ruins (two other clear influences) excel at, but as they have youth on their side – double bassist Ole Heyer looks like someone who might collar you outside the corner shop asking you to buy him some fags – they've got plenty more time to get it right.

Elsa Olsen S has the demeanour of a slightly kooky alien, but her mature performance on prepared piano integrates beautifully with Improv heavyweight Ikue Mori's flickering laptop transmissions. Once or twice the pianist reaches an impasse, perhaps surprised (as I was) by the busyness and density of Mori's contribution, but she manages to escape each time, producing some beautiful effects when engaging directly with her instrument's open strings. Paradoxically, Mori's solo set the following evening seems more spacious, involving some uncharacteristic drone explorations.

With festival co-curator Maja Ratkje electing not to perform this year, it falls to Stine Janvin Motland to fly the free vocalist flag as part of the duo Motsol. In tandem with inventive drummer Ståle Liavik Solberg – whose sensitivity and miniaturist wit recalls Paul Lovens appearing two nights later – the calm, charismatic singer shows huge range without once coming across as fleshy. With Solberg producing weird, almost human groans from rubbed and bowed percussion, Motland counters with lightning fast tongue clicks that uncannily resemble the sounds produced by Ikue Mori's laptop in the preceding set. A stretch that replicates the hyperventilating fury of a hellfire preacher has us pinned back in our seats, and draws huge and deserved applause.

Just before the appearance of the legendary godfathers of Japanese noise, Incapacitants, I hear an audience member explaining to his mates what they're about to receive. "Harsh noise – old school," he opines, sounding uncannily like a hiphop snob, and there is indeed something uncompromisingly geeky about the Incapacitants moshpit. Clearly, despite Maja Ratkje's enthusiasm for the notion that such an audience can be educated by exposure to the other forms of Improv on the programme, this lot are here for some action, and the J noise maestros Fumio Kosakai and Toshiji Mikewa do not disappoint. The tidal wave of distortion produced by the duo's contact mics and cheap FX is darkly terrifying and furiously exciting and the onstage antics of the mild mannered salarymen – writhing, screaming, punching the air in triumph and finally leaping into the pit – makes for an hour of top entertainment. I say an hour, it may have been half, or indeed twice that – time seems to stand still in the company of Incapacitants. The following evening they are joined by Finnish noisician Tommi Keränen. Any doubts that their ferocity might be diluted by collaboration disappear after about 30 seconds, and the Finn's air guitar moves with a contact miked film canister are a real gas.

New Zealand noise drone-escaper Campbell Kneale's gorgeous solo set under the Birchville Cat Motel banner is widely considered to be one of the highlights of the festival. The piece he concocts draws a long, sensual arc between a dreamy opening sample of Eastern chanting and a closing homage to Nelson Riddle, with Kneale himself seemingly surprised by the beautiful noise he's created. His duo show with Fe-Mail's Hild Sofie Tafjord is more angular and jagged, with the latter's French horn blasting holes through an angry swirl of feedback.

Friday offers the thrilling prospect of two Noxagt-related appearances: the first a solo performance by bassist Kjetil D Brandsdal, the second by guitarist Anders Hana's jazz noise duo MoHel. Neither quite manages to rise to the occasion. Brandsdal gets lost in some Gong-style glissando and can't seem to find a way out, and Hana (yet another frighteningly young Norwegian improvisor) struggles with some pretty grim amp hum throughout, eventually electing to embrace it rather than fight it. Drummer Morten Olsen's imaginative electronic treatments just about save the day.

The aforementioned Lovens appears in his now established duo with analogue synth player Thomas Lehn, in a performance of exquisitely judged pointillism, which eschews anything approaching a melodramatic gesture and yet in which neither player for one moment produces a familiar effect. Lol Coxhill's solo set is similarly restrained and at ease with itself. Coxhill does not go in for the circular-breathing power shrieks, but his haiku-like, almost conversational phrasing and low-key garrulousness make his performance one of the festival's most riveting.

The final concert takes place in a small library theatre, a deceptively intimate setting for the most explosive music of the event, a no holds barred face off between Spanish pianist Agusti Fernandez and Swedish sax hero Mats Gustafsson. Although playing separately until the latter stages of the concert, there's an unmistakable sense that their solo spots each represent a challenge to the other. It's not something one would imagine Gustafsson is used to, but the unbelievably intense pummelling to which Fernández subjects the piano strings in their duo piece leaves the Swede no possible point of entry. Eventually the pianist relents, Gustafsson enters on hushed tenor, and the pair ease off gradually into silence. The audience show the appreciation of those who know they've witnessed something very special.

KEITH MOLINÉ

Yuji Takahashi & Sabu Toyozumi

CANDY
TOKYO JAPAN

Candy Jazz Club in Inage, on the outskirts of Tokyo, had an audience of 15 to hear a remarkable and eminent piano/drums duo – the guys on the metro who wear white gloves could have shoved a few more in, but that small number was comfortable capacity in this intimate venue. Pianist Yuji Takahashi and percussionist Sabu Toyozumi performed two sets of vibrant improv, showing their mastery of the free idiom and their fertility and alacrity in exchanging musical ideas. The pianist has an almost preternatural preparedness and receptivity, his feline agility and animation infused with natural rubato and his light touch showing constant tonal and dynamic inflection. Toyozumi struck the components of his versatile kit with sticks, brushes, beaters and hands, achieving a unique delicacy and range of touch with each – his hand drumming was especially enthralling.

Yoshisaburo "Sabu" Toyozumi goes back a long way in Japanese jazz and Improv, from Masayuki Takayanagi's New Direction Unit in the late 60s through work with Kaoru Abe, Les Rallizes Denudes, Keiji Haino, Arthur Doyle and Peter Brötzmann. During the interval he explained that 'time' playing no longer interested him as it limited his freedom and creativity, but he's apparently still a superb groove player. Yuji Takahashi became known in the 60s, along with Tudor, Kontarsky, Woodward, Rzewski and a few others, as an advocate of the most challenging new music – Xenakis wrote *Herma* and *Eonta* for him.

Later he collaborated with improvisors such as Bailey, Frith and Otomo, and in 2002 commented that he was bored with playing the European avant garde. "Now many people play them so I don't have to do those works anymore. It should be so. Music will be passed to the new generation." But he still plays his own compositions. What makes a performer like Takahashi equally at ease in notated music and Improv? As a classical performer he avoids the preoccupation with conventional cantabile or singing touch that can distract from improvised values. It's also possible that as an interpreter, he's eager to maximise the macro-freedom in the moment that gives the lie to ill judged criticisms of "mechanical reproduction of the score". It was a privilege to hear two masters of the art of improvisation collaborating at the height of their powers.

ANDY HAMILTON

ANN THEW ODEN

Pram

Turntable Cafe: A Tribute To Joe Meek

SOUTH BANK CENTRE
LONDON UK

Joe Meek, the Karlheinz Stockhausen of the Holloway Road 1960 Islington's own Phil Spector exploring musique concrète, space echo, paranoia and seances while crafting hits for The Tornados ("Telstar"), John Leyton ("Johnny Remember Me") and the blond pompadoured Heinz. Jazz bandleader Humphrey Lyttleton recalls Meek producing his "Bad Penny Blues". Meek close-miked the piano, creating a sound that Lyttleton loathed, but when the single promptly became a hit, Lyttleton realised he knew nothing and resolved to keep quiet in future.

And so to the South Bank, where resident artists Saint Etienne's Turntable Cafe series tonight marks the 40th anniversary of Meek's death in February 1967. Saint Etienne co-founder and Meekologist Bob Stanley welcomes a good crowd to the Purcell Room. First we watch a 15 minute clip from an American documentary on Meek, currently in production under the title *Something I've Got To Tell You*. Meek himself is dapper to a fault, hair carefully quiffed and large dark eyes twinkling mischievously. Scratchy film from the period shows him cavorting in the studio and paddling at the beach, alongside hilarious pop video footage of girls in frocks embracing spacemen in giant helmets. Recent interviews include fulsome tributes to Meek's pioneer studio techniques from musicians young and old. Portly ex-Tornados loll on sofas and recall Meek shocking them with a demo of stereophonic sound. "Then the sound just disappeared through the opposite wall!" All this is interwoven with the melancholy of Meek's private life – a gay man, he shot himself in the year homosexuality was decriminalised – which also surfaces in the sci-fi sketches he wrote for his album *I Hear A New World*.

A live show from Birmingham's Pram follows. We haven't heard much from Pram since their 2003 release *Dark Island*, but they perfectly embody a gentler, less manic version of Meek's world: theremins, moon-landing keyboards and tape loops meld to create a seductive dreamland, ripe for escape. Pram on stage are a collective of seven, keyboards and computer racks draped with gold cloth, musicians framed by video animations. Trombone, clarinet and accordion add colour to the delightfully ramshackle songs, and Rosie Cuckston's warm, fragile voice acts as a distinctive focal point.

Sometimes moodily Ambient, Pram's rhythm section can punch hard when it wants to, and "Penny Arcade" from *Dark Island* becomes a louche swagger. In the context of a Joe Meek tribute, a song with bowed cymbal, theremin and gong sets the mind orbiting like a sputnik. *"We've gone crazy, so it seems/ Just like dust mites, in the sunbeams."*

CLIVE BELL

London Sinfonietta & Oliver Knussen: Henze, Stockhausen, Kagel

QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL
LONDON UK

Harmony and counterpoint were all the rage in this concert of recent German scores performed by London Sinfonietta conducted by Oliver Knussen. Mauricio Kagel's *Kammersymphonie* shredded conventional harmonic patterns and reassembled their residue into abstruse shapes and constructs, while his programme notes offered a philosophical tract on the rules and prohibitions of harmonic evolution. Hans Werner Henze's *Kammerkonzert 05*, a new chamber transcription of his 1947 *Symphony No 1*, generated what sounded like 12-tone music with tonal progressions, but the wild card of the evening was Karlheinz Stockhausen's aphoristic *Five Star Signs*.

Brushes with Stockhausen's recent music have been disheartening experiences for fans of his seminal early work, but when he puts ego massaging aside and once again deals with material, Stockhausen is still a class act. Five brief movements, each labelled with a sign of the zodiac, are anchored around a simple melodic statement. In the original incarnation of this music, *Tierkreis*, the melodic lines were open to embellishment, but now Stockhausen has fixed a luminous scoring that's rich in detail. Harmony piles up in white-note stacks and the material develops through the shifting perspectives of its orchestration – one section transfers busy layering down to brittle pizzicato strings, while another is transformed by a rude trombone glissando that slides against the prevailing modality. These are elusive and disciplined pieces that find Stockhausen re-engaging with his self-critical faculties.

Kagel's 40 minute *Kammersymphonie* was as densely composed and grounded as the Stockhausen piece: was epigrammatic and dreamlike. The work is based on a typical Kagelian concept – some rules of harmony are in place because they make technical sense, while others are issues of taste and style. Kagel points to the heady days of Darmstadt modernism, when doubling notes at the octave was frowned upon because it destroyed the basis of purist serial orthodoxy. In fact doubling notes is the only way to make orchestral music sound 'whole', and Kagel plays with this historical disjoint.

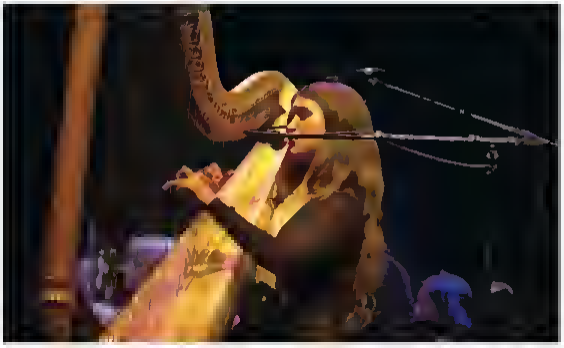
From an initial explosion, his material painfully puts itself back together and regroups. His highly inventive use of the ensemble pits percussive stabs against unlikely continuums – cowbells played with brushes fused with high harp tremolos, for example – until a catharsis point is reached where harmonic clichés float by and are shot down midstream. The Sinfonietta dug into Kagel's momentum: excellent contributions from bassist Enno Senft, and special mention must go to trombonist Michael Lloyd, whose trombone glissando in the Stockhausen piece slid all around the cavernous Queen Elizabeth Hall.

PHILIP CLARK

London Sinfonietta

RICHARD HAUGHTON (SINFONIETTA) DECLAN O NEILL (PRAM)

Joanna Newsom & The LSO



Joanna Newsom With The LSO

BARBICAN HALL
LONDON, UK

Joanna Newsom's second album *Ys* is something of a phenomenon. Recently I met a spry 60-something who was enthusiastically claiming how she was taking the music he had grown up with and moving it onto a different level, while an acquaintance claims his 75-year-old mother has been wall and truly beguiled by its charms. Others view it with utter bafflement. With the players from The London Symphony Orchestra seated, and conductor Baldur Bronnman at his podium, Newsom walks breezily onstage towards her harp wearing a pair of black suede peep-toe shoes with intimidating six-inch spike heels, plants them on the harp's pedals, takes a deep breath, then she's off: "*The meadowlark and the chim-chee-ree and the sparrow/Set to the sky in a flying spree, for the sport over the pharaoh* ..."

Ys is played in its entirety tonight – in the order of the album – and the first thing that strikes you is how sympathetically The LSO approach Van Dyke Parks's score. Parks achieves a balance of the sugary and the astringent that, curiously enough, is reminiscent of the way that Bernard Herrmann managed to meld these apparent opposites in his Hitchcock soundtracks.

On the album, the mix keeps the orchestra in the background so that it interjects tersely at times, around the voice and harp lines. But in the concert hall the ensemble – 30 players or so – have greater sonic presence and play with feeling, locking into the serpentine, yet tightly written ebb and flow of these lengthy songs. This empathy is remarkable considering that Newsom has used different ensembles at different venues to make this US/UK tour economically viable. Of course The LSO are a premier UK orchestra, but historically such ventures have occasionally spawned ill-starred collaborations, blighted by stiff and workmanlike performances from classical musicians faced with playing the kids' stuff of pop music. Not tonight: this is as good a performance of orchestrated song based music as *Forever Changes* with orchestra and *Smile* in 2004.

In Rob Young's interview in these pages (*The Wire* 273), Newsom revealed that she had gone for a mood of concentrated emotion when recording *Ys*, but live – somewhat paradoxically – her voice sounds more markedly relaxed and sensual.

The sound is boosted by Neal Morgan on percussion and backing vocals, and Ryan Francesconi on guitars, banjo and tamburo while a shifty-looking Bill Callahan wanders onstage to add his laconic vocals to "Only Skin", a song whose 17-minute span sounds less stretched live. The highlight, though was Newsom's concentrated solo performance "Sawdust And Diamonds", with her mesmeric, coruscating harp arpeggios entwined around a narrative that evokes imagery of Poe and Plath.

After the weighty main course and the well-deserved din of applause it prompted, in an unusual move, a short break was announced and Newsom returned with Francesconi and Morgan to play a palate-cleansing short set to finish. It turned out to be an inspired move, a 25-minute selection of songs from *The Milk-Eyed Mender*, including "Clam Crab Cockle Cowrie" and "Sadie", and an extraordinary new song, more crystalline than the *Ys* material, with a syncopated Celtic feel. But the highlight was another solo voice and harp song, the Scottish ballad "Ca' The Yowes", on which Newsome vocals were quite transcendentally beautiful. And I never ever thought I'd write that.

MIKE BARNES

The Plastic People Of The Universe & Peter Blegvad/ Chris Cutler/John Greaves/ Kristoffer Blegvad

QUEEN ELIZABETH HALL
LONDON, UK

This was The Plastic People Of The Universe's first visit to the UK, with interest rekindled (or, in many cases, kindled) in the Prague group by Tom Stoppard's play *Rock 'N' Roll*, which pays due homage to their role as precursors of the Velvet Revolution. Charter 77, the human rights petition drawn up by future President Vaclav Havel among others, arose out of disgust at the arrest and imprisonment of members of The Plastic People in 1976 on spurious charges of 'organised disturbance of the peace'. As a group, they have long outlived the regime that oppressed them, yet also defined them. Strangely, however, they fell inactive between the years 1988 and 1997, during the era when Czechoslovakia was undergoing the political upheaval they had helped inspire. They reunited for the 20th anniversary of Charter 77. This year, it's the 30th.

In support were Peter Blegvad, his brother Kristoffer, John Greaves and Chris Cutler, whose Recommended Records disseminated the Plastic People album *Egon Bondy's Happy Hearts Club Banned* in 1978, introducing them to a wider audience. Blegvad is an engaging but curious case. His faintly Teutonic surname and former association with Faust and Henry Cow, coupled with the musical company he likes to keep, mark him as a doyen of the avant garde. Yet his own musical leanings, be it out of irony or affection, are towards the après garde. Hence this set of amiable, customised Country rock, proceeding from number to number as if from small town to small town along a Midwestern freeway. Of course, the lyrics were nicely skewed, humorously existential, songs about car crashes, more songs about car crashes, another introduced by Blegvad as a "*Waiting For Godot* type number in which Godot actually turns up and you wished he hadn't". Cutler and Greaves were busy on drums and bass yet hardly extended. Still, all very good-natured.

The Plastic People were greeted with a thunderous ovation, a group with absolutely nothing to prove. Sadly, their founder Milan Hlavsa died in 2001 – his place has been taken by Eva Tornová on bass. They played a lot of familiar 70s material: "Toxics" ("Toxics"), "Nikdo" ("No One"). A number of Czechs in the audience titered appreciatively at the mordant satire of post-Egon Bondy's lyrics, finding in them ironies and inflections which aren't evident to non-Czechs even with the benefit of translation. The Plastic People never engaged in explicit, anti-Soviet or anti-government polemic. Their special form of insolence was to refuse to speak to power altogether, to engage in a sort of private conversation in their own chosen language.

The Plastic People Of The Universe

ANGELA LUBRANO/LIVE (NEWSOM); DECLAN O NEILL (PLASTIC PEOPLE)

In truth, something felt missing from this performance – the dank desperation of the original recordings has been replaced by the light, polished, capable sound of a group of old friends given a special and extended licence to have fun playing. But then The Plastic People raise both questions and eyebrows concerning notions of Art and Suffering. Few if any other groups have made the sort of sacrifices for their music that these Czechs did; few if any can claim the special role in steering the course of history The Plastic People can. Next to this unassuming group of ageing men and one woman, locked in a friendly tussle of bass, sax, guitars and keyboards, the anguished posturings of Western rock are exposed as self-deluding, self-dramatising. Normal rules of criticism were, therefore, suspended tonight, which felt more like a testimonial than a rock concert. That said, they did show some of their old momentous fire on occasion, particularly on "Okolo Okna" ("Past My Window"), as over a creeping bass riff, Vratislav Brabenec soars off on a Promethean sax solo that tore through the hell like a dove on fire.

DAVID STUBBS

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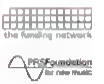

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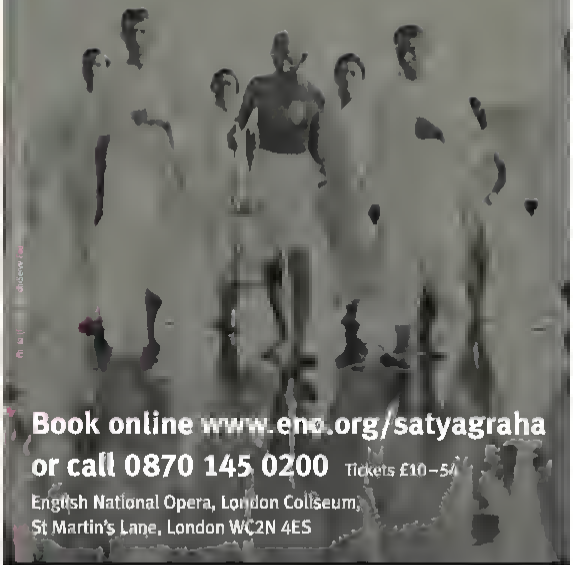

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275 Pentonville Rd L [illegible] 863 7020 [illegible] tillyandthewall [illegible] myspace com/
tillyandthewall myspace com [illegible] helit lec co myspace com/katenashmusic

THE EARLIES + MAPS + HALF COUSIN
SCALA Tuesday 6 March
275 Pentonville Road London [illegible] theearlies [illegible] myspace com/theearlies
myspace com [illegible] nel [illegible] com

PANDA BEAR + SPECIAL GUESTS
93 FEET EAST Thursday 8 March
150 [illegible] Lane London [illegible] 7247 [illegible] rock [illegible] myspace com/rippityrippity

KIERAN HEBDEN AND STEVE REID + VERY SPECIAL GUESTS
KOKO Thursday 29 March
1 Camden High St cc London 0870 4 [illegible] 7 yontnoe com/watch?v br8OOjTrzYA
[illegible] com [illegible] 845 YENimk [illegible] com/watch?v 1F7951n5yrY fcnrtot net

BOOM BIP + HALF COUSIN + GUESTS
CARGO Wednesday 25 April
83 Rivington Street London 020 7739 3344 boom bip com lexrecords com

ESPERS + VOICE OF THE SEVEN WOODS
DINGWALLS Thursday 26 April
Middle Yard Camden Lock London 020 [illegible] 87 1577 espers org myspace com/espers

ELECTRELANE + SPECIAL GUESTS
SCALA Wednesday 9 May
275 Pentonville Road London 020 7833 209 electrelane co uk [illegible] oopnrs com

BATTLES + SPECIAL GUESTS
SCALA Wednesday 16 May
275 Pentonville Road London 020 7833 2[illegible] battles com myspace com/battlestheband

SCOUT NIBLETT + GUESTS
BUSH HALL Monday 21 May
310 Uxbridge Road London [illegible] 8743 0955 scoutniblett com myspace com/scoutniblett
[illegible]

JAMES YORKSTON + GUESTS
THE UNION CHAPEL Thursday 24 May
Compton Terrace London N1 2UN 7226 1686 unionchapel org uk [illegible] jamesyorkston co uk myspace com/jamesyorkston dominic [illegible] com

[illegible] 0870 0 [illegible] 100 [illegible] 0870 1 201 119
[illegible] Trade Covent Garden 020 7240 0 [illegible]

EATYOUROWNEARS COM MYSPACE COM/EATYOUROWNEARS

Out There

This month's selected festivals, live events, clubs and broadcasts
Send info to The Wire, 23 Jack's Place, 6 Corbet Place, London E1 6NN, UK
Fax +44 (0)20 7422 5011, listings@thewire.co.uk. Compiled by Lisa Blanning

UK Festivals

Birds Eye View
LONDON
Film festival with international premieres and music events. VJing workshops and more. Highlights include Electric Ladyland showcasing a collection of music videos. London various venues. 8–14 March, times/prices vary. www.birds-eye-view.co.uk

Blac Weekend
NORFOLK
Another holiday camp festival, this time centred on electronic music. Artists include Autechre, Kool Keith, µ-Ziq, Digital Mystikz, Loefah, Rhythm And Sound, Aux 88, Bola, Andrea Parker and many more. Hemsby Pontins. 23–25 March. £105. www.blacweekend.com

Chinchilla fest
LEEDS
Featuring Trencher, Quack Quack, Printed Circuit, Man Aubergine, Tigersi and many more. Festival pass includes a CD and cookbook. Leeds Brudenell Social Club. 2–4 March. www.chinchillaweb.co.uk

Ether
LONDON
Annual event featuring performances by Nurse With Wound (3 March), Tunng (6–8), Modified Toy Orchestra (8), Mira Calix (10), Battles (12), a Human Beatbox Convention (18), Coldcut and Mixmaster Morris (18), Bixa Bargeld (19) and more. London South Bank Centre. 2–18 March. www.southbankcentre.co.uk

Guildford International Music Festival
GUILDFORD
Highlights include Sculpted Sound (9 March) a free performance by Herbert (13), Soluto (a multi speaker sound installation), The Unknown Elgar (14) and more. Guildford various venues. 9–24 March.
www.guildfordinternationalmusicfestival.co.uk

Optronica
LONDON
Festival celebrating the fusion of music and visuals. Featured artists include a Fennesz/Charles Atlas collaboration, Peter Greenaway, Trevor Jackson, Semiconductor, Ryoichi Kurokawa, Reactable and more. London various venues, times and prices. 14–18 March. www.optronica.org

UK Microfest 2
WALTON-ON-THAMES
Three days of discussions, talks and concerts concerning the pitches between the 12 standard intervals, featuring works by Lucier, Tenney, Partch and more. Walton-on-Thames Riverhouse. 2–4 March. £40/£25 festival pass. www.microtonalprojects.co.uk

International Festivals

ali_fib 2
FRANCE
Mini fest with Major Stars, Dinosaur With Horns, Little Howlin' Wolf, Ashtray Navigations, RDT and él-g. h Dkan with Phil Todd. Paris Instants Chavirés. 4 March. 4pm, €10. www.myspace.com/alifibgigs

Borealis
NORWAY
Festival for "contemporary music, noise and navigation" featuring Sunn O))) (in an 11th century cathedral), Banks Violette, Luigi Nono, Casco h, Alexander Robotnick, Kaija Saariaho, Bergen Philarmonic Orchestra, Plus Minus Ensemble, John Duncan, Testicle Hazard and others. Bergen various venues. 11–18 March. www.borealisfestival.no

Hipersônica
BRAZIL
São Paulo electronic music festival finds a new home in Rio, featuring Wolfgang Dorninger, Rafael Toral, Esquadrão Atari, Daedelus, Kode9, Scanner and Kassin. Rio De Janeiro Museum of Modern Art. 24 March. www.file.org.br

J-And-E
IRELAND
Festival of improvised and related music featuring John Tilbury, Joe Colley, Will Guthrie, Andrea Neumann, Lee Patterson, Eric La Casa, Judith Ring, Paul Vogel and more. Dublin Trinity College Printing House. 30 March–1 April, i-and-e.org

(K-BAA-K)²
BELGIUM
Line-up for the annual one day marathon now announced. Little Howlin' Wolf, Daniel Higgs, Sun City Girls, Bohman Brothers, Major Stars, Phil Minton, Jozef Van Wissem and more, plus films and 'wanderings'. Hasselt Artcenter Belgie. 3 March, €20/€17. www.kraak.net

MaarzMusik
GERMANY
This year's focus is on the Alpine regions including an orchestral space installation by Klaus Lang, Beat Furrer, The Ensemble Contrechamps, Koch-Schütz-Studer, Polwechsel, Hermann Nitsch and more. Berlin various venues. 16–25 March. €80/€45 festival pass. www.maarzmusik.de

Nozart
GERMANY
Two nights of improvisation featuring SSH (Schultz/Scholly/Heberer), Niggli/Wei, Bennink/Jaroschek, SWLABR, Chris Cutler/Hugh Hopper, Das Exzentrische Filmorchester, Joe McPhee Trio and Azeotrop. Cologne Basement. 2–3 March. €30/festival pass. www.nozart.de

Perspectives
SWEDEN
Mats Gustafsson curates two days of music, film, exhibitions and seminars. Featuring Evan Parker, The Thing with Joe McPhee, Skull Defekts with Lasse Marhaug, The Ex, Eye, Mohal, Marilyn Crispell-Palle Danielsson Quintet and more. Västerås various venues. 9–10 March. www.nyaperspektiv.se

Presences
FRANCE
Electronic music in one of its spiritual homes, featuring works by Edgard Varèse, Denis Dufour and Michäle Bokanowski, plus performances from Matmos, silva noto, Mouse On Mars, The Books, Scanner, Bixa Bargeld and more. Paris GRM. 15–18 March. www.ina.fr

SFIFEM
USA
The Santa Fe International Festival of Electroacoustic Music will feature David Dunn, invited composers Joan La Barbara and Diane Thome, a James Tenney memorial concert, radio broadcasts, installations and more. Santa Fe various venues. to 15 March (concerts 1–3 March). sfifem.csf.edu

UK
HUNGARY
Electronic and experimental festival featuring Es, Isiaja, Kemalliset Ystävät, FM3, Marcus Schmickler, Mouse On Mars, Thomas Ankersmit, Alec Empire, Florian Hecker/Tina Frank, Patrick Pulsinger and more. Budapest Merlin. 21–25 March. fest.uh.hu

Guildford International Music Festival
9 – 24 March 2007
Festival Highlight
Tinariwen – Monday 19 March
First gig of their national tour
www.guildfordinternationalmusicfestival.co.uk
Box Office 01483 444334

Special Events

Christos Hatzis: *Constantinople*
UK
European premiere of Christos Hatzis's opera featuring surround sound, electroacoustics and projectors alongside performers to create a sound and image immersion. London Royal Opera House. 21–25 March, various times, £18–£9. www.roh.org.uk

Contemporaneo
ITALY
Seven month festival of music, cinema and art in Rome. Anthony Braxton/William Parker/Milford Graves (16 March), Mika Vainio's *Curve Del Tempo E Dello Spazio* (17 March) and Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Proiezione Del Suono* (7 May). Auditorium Parco Della Musica Roma. to July 2007. www.auditorium.com

Etnafest
ITALY
Another Italian festival of music, cinema and art, this one in Catania, Sicily. Featuring Elliott Sharp's Terraplane (3 March), Susie Ibarra Trio (1 April), Willem Breuker Kollektief (13 July) and David Toop (26 July), among many others. Catania various venues. www.etnafest.it

Frequencies
USA
The gallery is converted into an experimental music space, staging 20 performances throughout the month. Brooklyn Black & White. to 5 March. www.frequenciesnyc.com

Ray Lee *Siren*
UK
Whirling-blade sound installation (see Cross Platform, page 18). London Kinetica, 15–25 March. www.kinetica-museum.org

Phill Niblock: *The Movement Of People Working*
UK
The works of Phill Niblock. More than 20 films are shown, projected on 12 screens accompanied by his music. London Sketch. to 10 March, free. www.sketch.uk.com

New Humans *Disassociate*
USA
New York minimal noise group present durational installation/sculptures and performances. New York Elizabeth Dee. to 31 March. www.newhumansnyc.com

New Interfaces For Performance
UK
Artist led workshop examining techniques for creating New Media and interactive work for live performance. Lead artists include Zachary Lieberman, Michel Waisvisz, Christina Kubisch and Lotta Melin. Bristol various venues. 30 March–1 April, www.newinterfaces.net

Nothing Like The Sun
UK
Two-part performance curated by Gavin Bryars featuring compositions by Antony Hegarty, Alexander Balanescu, Elizabeth Fraser and others, plus an extended work by Bryars

himself Nottingham Djanogly Theatre (3 March) Gateshead Sage (13) Manchester Royal Northern College of Music (15) Leeds College of Music (17) www.rsc.org.uk

Savage Pencil & Dennis Tyfus
GERMANY
Retrospective and new works by *Wire* illustrator Savage Pencil (aka Edwin Pouncey) plus drawings and paintings by Belgian artist (and current *Wire* T-shirt designer) Dennis Tyfus, as well as collaborative drawings between the two. Bremen Spadition 31 March–15 April (opening 31 March 8pm) 3pm–8pm www.spadition.bremen.org

[silence]
USA
Group exhibition exploring silence, featuring Lee Ranaldo, Douglas Repetto, Michelle Rosenberg, Stephen Vitiello, David LaSpina, LoVid, Juan Matos Capote and more. New York Gigantic Art Space, to 31 March, free www.giganticartspace.com

Solo Spotlights
UK
SPNM series of concerts. Ruth Wall (8 March), Jane Chapman (13), David Alberman (20), Damian Herron (27). London Wapping Power Station, Tuesdays, 7.30pm. £30/£15 series pass, £10/£5 individual concerts www.spnm.org.uk

On Stage

!!!
Funk punk octet return to the UK. Glasgow ABC (19 March), Manchester Ritz (20), Leeds University Stylus (21), London Shepherd's Bush Empire (22), Nottingham Marcus Garvey Ballroom (23), Bristol University Aston Rooms (24)

John Butcher & The Oxford Improvisers Orchestra
Leading UK saxophonist and likeminded explorers. Oxford Jacqueline Du Pre Music Building, 17 March, 7.45pm, £9/£6, www.oxfordimprovisers.com

John Cale
London Mean Fiddler (17 March), Reading Fez Club (18), Oxford Zodiac (19), www.john-cale.com

Cyrk & Utterpsalro
An evening of far out sounds featuring Morphogenesis, a rare live set by John Wall & Lgamble, Megos Evol, Dave Phillips and Ward/Beresford duo. London Red Rose, 23 March, 7.30pm, £8/£6, www.cyrk.org

Rhodri Davies
Three sound events for wind harp, water harp and fire harp in three locations by harpist Davies. Bangor various locations, 12–7pm free, 01248 382173, www.rhodridavies.co.uk

EST
Sweden's Esbjorn Svensson Trio visit Sage Gateshead (17 March), Edinburgh Usher Hall (18), Perth Concert Hall (19), Bristol Colston Hall (20), London Barbican (21), Birmingham Symphony Hall (22). www.serious.org.uk

Future Of Sound
Tour bringing together artists, musicians and researchers convened by Martyn Ware. Featuring Brian Duffy (Modified Toy Orchestra), Scanner, Luciana Haill, The Sancho Plan and more. London Goldsmiths College (1 March), London Royal College of Art (15), London Queen Mary's College (12 April) www.futureofsound.org

Frode Gjerstad Trio
Norwegian modern improv trio with support from New Dutch Swing Duo Baars Hennaman. Leeds Adalphi Hotel, 8pm, £6/£5 www.qubik.com/termite

Gobsmack: Thinking Outside The Voicebox
Artists who take the human voice to the limits. Juice, Curious Voice Duo, Jamie Woon, Jenni Rodd and Wan Dan. London Spitz, 18 March, 8.30pm, 8pm, £5, www.spitz.co.uk

Kieran Hebden & Steve Reid
The now regular laptop/drums duo hits the road. Exeter Phoenix (20 March), Bristol Cooler (21), Nottingham Rescue Rooms (22), Sheffield Plug (23), Manchester Academy (24), Edinburgh Liquid Rooms (25), Newcastle Cluny (26), Birmingham Medicine Bar (27), London Koko (29), Brighton Komedia (31)

Daniel Higgs
Former Lungfish frontman. London State 51 (with Alexander Tucker and Guapo, 9 March), Bristol Cafe Kino (10), Brighton West Hill Village Hall (11), Nottingham Lee Rosy's Tea (12), Skipton Christchurch (13), Newcastle Star & Shadow (14), Glasgow Captain's Rest (15), Manchester Platt Chapel (16)

LCD Soundsystem
Birmingham Academy (7 March), Leeds Met University (8), Glasgow Barrowlands (9), Manchester Academy (10), Norwich UEA (11), Bristol Academy (13), London Astoria (14–16), www.lcdsoundsystem.com

Ligeti Remembered
The London Sinfonietta pay tribute to György Ligeti. The first is conducted by George Benjamin and also features pieces by Alexander Goehr and Oliver Knussen (13 March). The second features more of his sonic landscapes (30). London Queen Elizabeth Hall, 13 & 30 March, 7.30pm, £22–£8

Living Composers: 60 Miniatures
12 avant garde composers were commissioned to write five piano pieces, none lasting longer than one minute each. London Space, 9 March, 8pm £7/£5, 020 7515 7799

reuaerforene
A tour of solo steel resonator guitar. Brighton Fatherberts (3 March), Hull The Lamp (5), Sheffield Red Deer (7), Leeds Common Place (8), Newcastle Star And Shadow (with Raccoo-oo-oon, 10), Aberdeen Tunnels (11), Edinburgh Henry's Cellar Bar (12), Glasgow Captain Rest (with Daniel Higgs, 15), Manchester Basement (16), Nottingham tba (17), Bristol Lansdown (18), Cardiff Buffalo Bar (with Ill Esse, 21) www.myspace.com/seedsandbridges

Marissa Nadler
Gothic-folk stylings. London Spitz, 12 March, £10/£8, www.marissanadler.com

Panda Bear
Core Animal Collective member celebrates his new album *Person Pitch*. London 93 Feet East, 8 March, 7.30pm, £10.50, www.paw-tracks.com

Raccoo-oo-oon
Time Lag artists bring their psych-punk primitive jazz blues to the UK. Manchester Islington Mill (7 March), Glasgow Nice n Sleazy (8), Leeds Common Place (9), Newcastle Star & Shadow (10), Sheffield Red House (11), Cambridge Portland (12), Nottingham Old Angel (13), Bristol Seymours Family Club (14), Brighton The Hope (15), London Bardens Boudoir www.raccoo-oo-oon.org

Salford Concert Series
Series of live events, this one featuring electroacoustic improvising quartet consisting of Angharad Davies, Rhodri Davies, Lee Patterson and Ben Gwilliam. Salford University of Salford Peel Hall, 13 March, 7.30pm, free, www.myspace.com/thereallepatterson

Semiconductor vs Antenna Farm
Makers of digital sound-film, music videos and live animation Semiconductor collaborate with FatCat/Phthalo/Staalplaat artists Antenna Farm. Support from Vi and Rod K Maclachlan. Bristol Cube Cinema, 9 March, 7pm, £5

Tight Meat Duo
Free jazz duo featuring *Wire* contributor David Keenan and Jandek/Will Oldham collaborator Alex Neilson. Manchester Islington Mill (with with Raccoo-oo-oon, 7 March), Sheffield Fagans Hideout (8), London Whitechapel Gallery (with Alexander Tucker, 9), Brighton Prince Albert (10, 2pm), London LSE Shaw Library (with Hush Arbors, 12, 1.30pm), Cambridge Portland Arms (with Um, 13), Bristol Seymours Family Club (with Raccoo-oo-oon, 14), Birmingham The Victoria (15), London Bardens Boudoir (with Raccoo-oo-oon, 16), Nottingham Lee Rosy's (17), Newcastle Cumberland Arms (with Jazzfinger, 18), Leeds Packhorse (with Ashtray Navigations (19), Edinburgh tba (20), Glasgow University Union Debating Chamber (with Heather Leigh, 21). www.volcanictongue.com

U Roy & Junior Murvin
Two roots superstars. London Albany, 4 March, 7.30pm, £22/£17, www.thealbany.org.uk

Vampire Belt
Bombed-out guitar/drums chaos from Bill Nace and Chris Corsano. London Bardens Boudoir, 1 March, 8pm, £5, www.upsettherhythm.co.uk

White Magic
Drag City's dark folksters. London Old Blue Last (27 February), Manchester Islington Mill (28), Glasgow Nice n Sleazy (1 March), Dublin Boom Boom Room (2), Cork Unitarian Hall (3), Liverpool tba (4), Newcastle Star And Shadow Cinema (5), Bristol Cooler (6), Brighton tba (7) www.myspace.com/whitemagicmusic

Club Spaces

Boat-Ting
Improv and-more club on a boat. With Lol Coxhill/Steve Noble/John Edwards, John Jasnoch/Charlie Collins/Beatrix Ward, The Otters (5 March), Hugh Metcalfe/Alan Wilkinson/Paul May, They Came From The Sea, Dead Days Beyond Help (19). London Yacht Club, 8pm, £5/£3, www.boat-ting.com

Bohman Brothers Present
Improvised music nights with performances by Ry Dm (Ryo Ikeshiro/Tom Shelton) (7 March), Dilie Mayne/Stefano Tedesco/Jerry Wiggins and more (21). London BAC, 7 & 21 March, 8.45pm, £5/£3, 020 7223 2223

Cube Cinema
Music, movies and creative events. Malarchy and Kooch (3), The Blessing vs Limbo (10), Teenage Rampage Tour (16), Bracken + SJ Esau (22), Festival Of Birds (23) www.cubecinema.com

Fear Of Jazz
With Philip Jeck, Elle Barbarian and Ismaj Dur. London Pool, 28 March, 8pm, £5

FiZZLE
Regular experimental night featuring Tony Levin and Paul Rutherford in duo and as a quartet with Mike Hurley and Joe Egan. Birmingham Lamp Tavern, 13 March, 8.30pm, £5, www.fizzle.info

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(FOLK - KRANKY - UK)
MARZO
VENERDI 2
KILL THE VULTURES
(DARK JAZZY HIP HOP - USA)
GUEST: LATO OSCURO
(HIP HOP - ITA)
SABATO 3
DEVASTATIONS
(DESERT FOLK - AUS)
VENERDI 9
RONIN (FOLK - ITA)
DJ SET: CALAMARINERI
SABATO 10
VAGUE ANGELS
(INDIE - ALTERNATIVE - USA)
GUEST: THE GANG
SABATO 24
A HAWK AND A HACKSAW
(BALCANIC FOLK - NEW MEXICO)
SABATO 31
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(FIN/FRA - FOLK)
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Free Radicals
Concerts for established and emerging improvisors with Viv Corringham/Pat Thomas duo Adrian Northover and Yedo Gibson/ Ricardo Tejero/Veryan Weston trio London Red Rose 7 March 8pm £5/£3

Fromp
Ongoing free improv night now in a new venue with the regular quartet of Paul Dunmall/Bruce Coates/Mark Sanders/Trevor Lines joined by guests Tony Marsh/Barry Edwards/Mike Hurley Birmingham Victoria 1 March, 8pm, £6/£4 0121 415 4491

Klinker North
March events include Squeaky Donkey + Frank Bangay/Tunde Busan (2 March), Dreamtime Quartet + Fiona Branson + Ambrosia Rasputin (9) John Edwards + Skip + Hugh Metcalfe's Super 8 films + Sky Pirates (16) Plakka + This Bird Flies (23) Sylvia Hallett/Jim Le Baigue/ Steve Noble/ Hugh Metcalfe performing in memory of Paul Burwell plus the film *Resurrection* (30) London Black Horse, every Friday 8 30 £5/£3 www klinkerclub info

Klinker South
South of the river partner to the above Buckrabbit + Elwell + Quobble (1 March) Terry Edwards + Claudi Darodi/Alessandro Buzzi/Ian McLachlan/Jaz Parfett + John Clark (8) Data + Al Eason/John Edwards Duo + Lamon Squeezer (15) Mel Zebra's Paraffernalia + Fuck Off Batman (22) and Bart Shaft Orchestra + Aida Savero (29) London Ivy House every Thursday 020 7635 7824 www klinkerclub.info

Knee Knees
Regular experimental nights in Nottingham featuring performances from Lee Patterson/ Rhodri Davies/Angharad Davies Nancy Elizabeth Cunliffe Matt Milton/Patrick Farmer Om/Stefan Tadesco/Jerry Wiggins Nottingham Rose Of England 12 March www kneeknees co uk

On The Edge
Improvised and experimental music from The Safehouse Wildcard Ensemble Bela Emerson/ Kirsten Elliott Duo and Franklin Reave and his jazz trio Brighton Open House 28 March, 8 30pm £5/£4, Gusgarside@ntiworld.com

Ray's Jazz
Monthly free improvisation series continues with Oxford Improvisors Dominic Lash and Pete McPhail London Ray's Jazz at Foyles 29 March 5pm free 020 7440 3205

Recluse
New night devoted to leftfield music drones and dissonance With The Temporary Shekers Rocketnumbernine Archslider and Kontakte London The Enterprise 2 March 8pm £5/£4, www myspace com/recluseclubnight

Spirit Of Gravity
Electronic and experimental music night, with music from Bela Emerson Gus Garside/Tony Rimbaud/Thor Magnusson/Dan Powell and Chevron Brighton Marlborough Theatre 27 March 8 30pm £4/£3 www spiritofgravity com

Whiteckapel Late Night Fridaya
Wire-supported weekly twilight adventures in music performance and art with Agaskodo Talverak + Sleeping States (2 March) Alexander Tucker + Tight Meat Duo (9) Sonora (16) ONL (23) and Greedy Magpie (30) London Whitechapel every Friday 7–11pm £6–£3 www whitechapel.org

Incoming

All Tomorrow's Parties. Weekend One
UK
The Dirty Three on curatorial duties Nick Cave Einstürzende Neubauten, Cat Power Felix Lajko Low Brokeback, A Silver Mount Zion Bill Callahan Papa M, Tara Jane O Neil and more Minehead Butlins, 27–29 April £140/£120 www atpfestival com

All Tomorrow's Parties. Weekend Two
UK
"ATP Vs The Fans", half of the line-up chosen by ATP and the other half voted for by ticket holders Acts include Ya La Tengo Shellac Built To Spill Sparklehorse, Notwist Akron Family Do Make Say Think and more Minehead Butlins 18–20 May £140/£120 www atpfestival com

Ooming
BELGIUM
Annual week-long *Wire*-sponsored festival as showcased on this month's free subscriber CD Performances include CocoRosie, Ill Amon Tobin, Thee Silver Mt Zion Memorial Orchestra, Fennesz, Joanna Newsom Ignatz Raster Notons RPM and more plus exhibitions screens and DJs Brussels Ancienne Belgique 11–18 April www abconcerts be

Ooneufestival
AUSTRIA
Two weekends including two days curated by David Tibet featuring Baby Dee Bonnie 'Prince' Billy Current 93 Hush Arbors Marc Almond Nurse With Wound Matmos Om, Six Organs Of Admittance and more as well as two performances by Throbbing Gristle and their chosen artists Zeitkratzer Boredoms, Russell Haswell Florian Hecker KTL, Alan Vega and more Donau various venues 15–21, 27–30 April www donaufestival.at

Free Noise
UK
A *Wire*-supported CMN tour with a stellar line up Evan Parker Yellow Swans C Spencer Yeh John Wiese Paul Hession Metalux John Edwards and Culver Edinburgh Bongo Club (28 April) Glasgow CCA (29) Cardiff The Point (30), Sage Gateshead (1 May) Leeds Wardrobe (2) Bristol Arnolfini (3) London ULU (5) www.no-fi org uk, www cmntours org uk

Kill Your Timid Notion
SCOTLAND
Wire-sponsored festival of experimental music, film and visual art featuring performances by CUBE, William Raban Keith Evans/Coelacanth Joe Colley Andrew Lampert, Steve Beresford/ Okkyung Lee Ken Jacobs Greg Pope AVVA and LEVOX Dundee Contemporary Arts 12–15 April £26/£22 festival pass www arika org uk

Music Lovers' Field Companion
UK
Festival featuring Diamanda Galas Sanjah William Parker Polwechsel Junko/Masayoshi Urabe Aufgehoben Hisato Higuchi Peter Evans Ascension, Angharad Davies/Tisha Mukarji/Andrea Neumann Gary Smith Ikuro Takahashi and more Sponsored by *The Wire* Sage Gateshead 11–13 May, www arika org uk

No Fun Fest
USA
Noise-a-thon featuring Yoshimi & Kim Gordon Keiji Haino Hive Mind Hair Police Thurston Moore Merzbow Sissy Spacek and more Brooklyn Hook, 17–20 May $65/festival pass www nofunfest.com

Out There items for inclusion in the April issue should reach us by Friday 2 March

UK Radio

Resonance 104.4 FM

NB Resonance is now scheduled quarterly as of January 2006 The station broadcasts across Central London noon–1am, seven days a week CD quality Web streaming and full listings at www resonancefm com

Adventures In Modern Music
Thursday 8pm Presented by *The Wire* staff

Audition
Sunday 7pm Improvised music lowercase sound hosted by Sound 323

Balling The Jack
Tuesday 3 30pm Blues with Joe Cushley

Black Friday Friday 9pm Death Metal

Counter Culture Radio
Thursday noon With Rough Trade staff

Cowabungal Surfs Up
Wednesday 3pm. Surf music

Decibel Breach
Saturday 12am Dubstep mash-ups with DJ Wrong Speed and friends

Far Side Radio
Wednesday 12 noon With Paul Fisher

Fifty-Fifty Sound System
Tuesday 11 30pm Old Skool dub & reggae

Glammore & More
Wednesday 9pm With Matthew Glammore

Hello Goodbye
Saturday 12noon Indie with Dexter Bentley

Late Lunch With Out To Lunch
Wednesday 2pm With Ben Watson

Mining For Gold
Thursday 11pm With Johny Brown and special guest Peter Hammill (1 March)

Muse Luso
Monday 1pm Portuguese music

(Not The Bermuda Triangle) Again
Thursday midnight. Club 2012s
Easy Listening

Nostalgie Ya Mkoka
Saturday 1.30–2.30pm Congolese music from the 1950s-1990s

Now's The Time
Monday 5 30pm Contemporary jazz

OST
Saturday 4 30pm Jonny Trunks soundtracks

Radio
Monday 3pm Radiophonic experiments

Rock Fort
Saturday 2.30pm. French pop esoterica

Scaledowa
Alternate Fridays 4 30pm. Experimental gigs

Solid Steel
Friday 11pm With Coldcut

Sounds Of The Universe
Thursday 5 30pm With the Soul Jazz DJs

Sound Projecting
Friday 5 30pm With Ed Finsent

The Traditional Music Hour
Thursday 2pm With Reg Hall and friends

Two Degrees
Tuesdays 4.30pm Climate change show hosted by Phil England

BBC Radio 1 97–99 FM

Gilles Peterson Worldwide
Thursday 2–4am. Global grooves

BBC Radio 3 90–93 FM

Jazz On 3
Friday 11 30–1am
Jazz in session and concert

Hear And Now
Saturday 11pm–1am
New Music magazine

Late Junction
Monday–Thursday 10 30–midnight

Mixing It
Friday 10 15–11 30pm Eclectic avant mix

BBC Lancashire
95 5 / 103 9 / 104 5 FM 855 MW

On The Wire
Saturday 10pm–midnight. With Steve Barker

BBC Merseyside 95 8 FM, 1485 MW

PMS
Sunday midnight–2am Avant sounds mixed

Cable Radio 89 3 FM (Milton Keynes)

Garden Of Earthly Delights
Friday 10pm–midnight. Eclectic avant mix

XFM 104 9 FM (London)

Fin Matton
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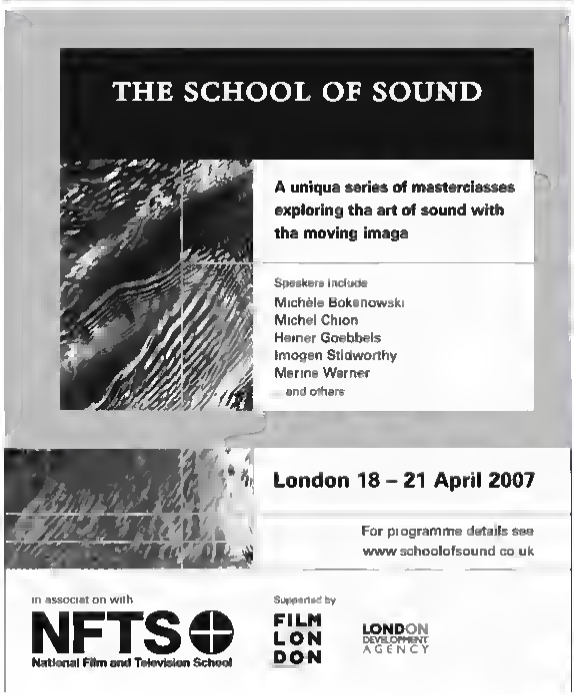
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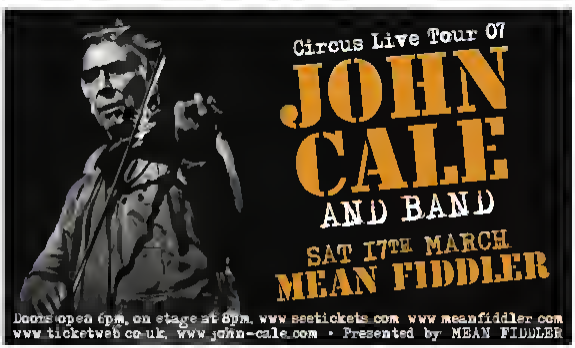
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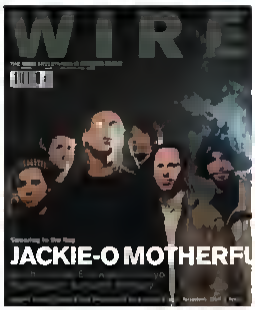

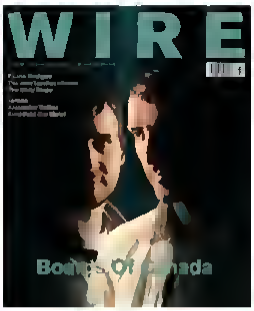

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The Wire Tapper 1 Issue 170 April 1999
Vega/Vainio/Varsanen Mass Mixmaster Mike [illegible] (cut) dh Vs Scanner Scala Cosmicus Rendalius Nassim Manfauf Sellex, Kinetic Dj Food Vs Dreadsyne Arto Lindsay Schneider TM Portus Nicks Midnight Funk Association Mimi, 2nd Gen

The Wire Tapper 2 Issue 177 November 1999
Sticks, Rhys Chatham Angela Jaegar & David Cunningham DAF Tom Ze Mandrem (Percy Howard/Fred Frith/Bill Laswell/Charles Hayward) Jane Dowe & Torre Thomsitz, Terwatna Powerfield Sam Frakop Puppy Jad Fair & Ye La Tenga The Fastals Badawi Labradford

The Wire Tapper 3 Issue 182 April 1999
Supersilent, High Rise Nothing We Gas Te Rococo Rot, Thurston Moore/Evan Parker/Walter Prati Medal 500, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma Khan Hood Fennfuysen Robert Ashley Sheila Chandra Void Rhys Chatham

The Wire Tapper 4 Issue 188 August 1999
FX Randomiz, Pauline Anstan, and Pan American & BJ Cole Vandermark 5, SS+O Alog Powerfield Low Rise Chuck Bennett & His Rudu Man, Olive Graham Do Make Say Think, Warm Defender Signal Klangstabil Unit, Daniel Figgis

The Wire Tapper 5 Issue 193 March 2000
Labradford Stephan Vitalis Vainio/Varsanen/Einhorn, Kimmo Pohjonen Wire Stylus John Wall Cool Duck Funnesz/O Runiks/Rahberg Im Sara Vs Nasse Camp Daniel Givens, Anne Nordheim Ye La Tenga Vert Aasep Quartet, Mint Celeb, Fushitsusha

The Wire Tapper 6 Issue 200 October 2000
CD1 The Fall Flanger, Susumu Yokota Ben Blake Christian Marclay Otomo Yoshihide Sensational General Magic Fan Sonic Jan Jelinek points, HIM David Grubbs Tree Hurricane+1 Angus MacLise, Glass Cage
CD 2 Nurse With Wound, Faust, John Fahey Nels Økland Coil Janek Schaefer Current Nasty Thing Dylan Gasperyan Peanut Butter Wolf featuring Kasco I-Sonic, BitTon & [illegible] (cut) dh C Schulz & Hajach Tom Recchion Pluramon Hermann Nitsch

The Wire Tapper 7 Issue 207 May 2001
Four Tet, Pulseprogramming Daniel Figgis Jin Hi Kim, Kim Hartley Antikatts/Arabert Orchestra Kage Jus Nolte Steinbrüchel Mice Parade, Illusion Of Safety/Monks Of The Monastery Of Byütö, Thet, Earthum, Lasse Marhaug Max Nagl/Edward Gorey Insaturing Jube Tipperts

The Wire Tapper 8 Issue 215 January 2002
23 Skidoo Jah Wobble & Temple Of Sound, Cornelius Fog Greenheart Allen Fowell Trio Chas Smith, Michael Jon Fink, Minoret Electrelane No Neck Blues Band Set Fire To Flames Workshop Small Rocks The Rip Off Artist Nexage Xinli Supreme

The Wire Tapper 9 Issue 225 November 2002
CD 1 Liars Themselves Terwatna Mum Badawi Suicide Supersilent, Polyechsel/Funnesz Wazwhugy Asa Chang & Junray Deerbeat, Vedim The Oxes Sagan Lasfactum John Son
CD 2 Max Tundra Wire Sonic Youth/ICP/The Ex, Sigur Ros John Fahey A Small Good Thing The Sea And Cake Masha Qrella Octaphone Polaprogramming Electrelane Ellery Eskelin with Andrew Parkins & Jim Black Jimmy Lyons Trio Aman Tobin, D Arcangelo

The Wire Tapper 10 Issue 235 October 2003
CD 1 Gnido Mobius Alms Ansmil Collective Maher Shalal Hash Raz Sketch Show Kim Hiorthoy Mice Parade Colleen Themselves Lemon Connoisseur & David Grubbs Filmer Palps Faust & Dalek, Four Tet, Nick Ellis, David Sylvian
CD 2 Heat Sensation featuring M Sayyid Günter Müller & Toshimaru Nakamura Stelrenn Hakan Schlumpertzegar Jah Wobble Lubach Lumen Saturn Wine Ur Erik Friedlander Susanna And The Magical Band Clogs Sagan & Swing, Satan Commercialtshop David Grubbs

The Wire Tapper 11 Issue 244 June 2004
Tri Repeater Rot, Icarus Jonna Molina Whitus, Philip Cleme, Albert Ayler, Chris McGregor & The Brotherhood Of Breath Matthew Dear Jah Wobble Arthur Russell Henrik Oylandet Green Milk From The Planet Orange Mountains Slowblow Un Cadeau Renversé Dans L'Herbe poire z & Phi Minton

The Wire Tapper 12 Issue 250 December 2004
CD 1 Dan el Bro & Rob Palmer, Gilbert Bark Psychosis Atelier & David Dunscill Andy Moor & Yannis Kyriakides Burnt Friedman & The Nu Dub Players Aesop Rock, Fire Velvet, Michaela Melian, Chris Smith, Martin Archer Henry Grimes Trio The Nicks C Ascoltare Matthew Bourne Stéphane Rives Ergo Phizmiz, The Fall
CD 2 Cut Da Sac & Demo Suzuki, Maurice Hanse, Milky Globe Starlight Soundsystem Jason Kahn & Günter Müller Andrew Fielder Carter Tutti Dj Kupture featuring Star Nancy Burnt Sugar Vs The Dominatrix Am/Pm David Grubbs & Nikos Veliotis Gary Lucas & Jozef Van Wissem, Bonnie "Prince" Billy & Matt Sweeney Damon & Naomi, Fax & Alex Ayuli Ana De Silva Christian Renau Enigma Device Shining M Randey

The Wire Tapper 13 Issue 256 June 2005
Hanna Hukkelberg Mandarin Movie, Alexander Hacke Matt Elliott Juana Molina Picastro Deviationists Kid606 Anal Pinks Haunted Graffiti, John Sinclair, Nick Castro Junkboy Alonzo Currituck Co Bombay 1 Fage Cinematic Orchestra Fort Royal Fever Hax Tin M

The Wire Tapper 14 Issue 262 December 2005
Oren Marshall Dirty Projectors Secret Mommy Cage Ray Russell Kieran Hebden & Steve Reid Black Tie Cosmic Cobra Killer Garry Mitchell & Little Sparta Xxl Merz, Hans Fjellestad, Nels Cline/Willy Shoup/Chris Cousins Andrey Kirichenko, This Heat, Maha

The Wire Tapper 15 Issue 268 June 2006
Humcrush Lasfactum John Mach network, Reverberphon, Yannis Kyriakides & Andy Moor Jozef Van Wissem Floyd Nefio Giuseppe Ielasi Gamit & John Wise Dub Trio Izu, Makaya Lawrence English & Ai Yamamoto Herbert Sell Slappy Trevor Watts Green Spoonculve Ianaj Dui Dat Gamin Landat

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Orone Spiderhead Dave Phillips Alan Vega, Philip Samson, Carlos Tutti radiofishes, Walter & Sabrina Xela Kotra & Zavelska Panserno Hunter Ro Fluorescent Grey Derek Bailey Tul pomanie Dave Swede eMute Caldone Inch time White Magic The Sits Anthony Kelly & David Stalling

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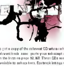

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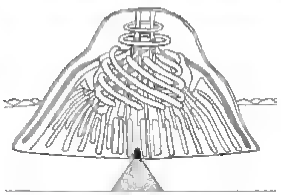

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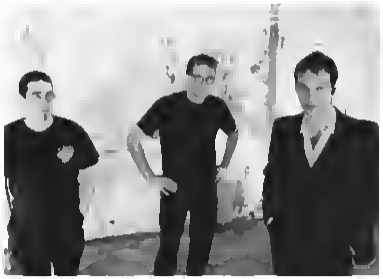

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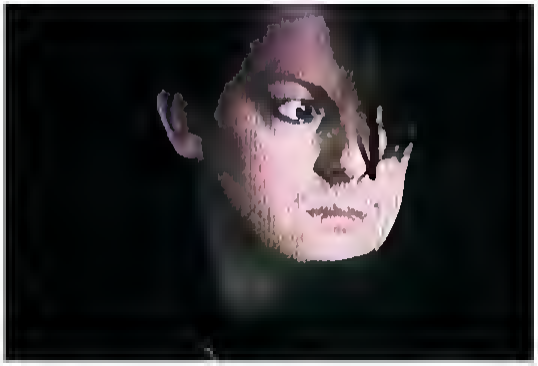
Epiphanies

Before the MTV crackdown, Cabaret Voltaire's videos killed the radio stars, and their tape cut-ups opened the way forward for other non-musicians. By Peter Rehberg



TV eyeful: Richard H Kirk in *Doublevision Presents Cabaret Voltaire*

It was autumn 1982. As part of my school work experience I was helping out in a land surveyors' office in St Albans – a suburban commuter town north of London. One drizzly morning, one of the older chaps working there was bemoaning his ownership of a certain record. Possibly the worst thing he'd ever heard, he complained. It sounded like someone chucking a kitchen sink down the stairs. The more he ranted about it, the more I became intrigued. I quizzed him relentlessly, until he said he'd give it to me. Next day I was the proud owner of *Red Mecca* by Cabaret Voltaire.

At the time they were a trio consisting of Richard H Kirk, Stephen Mallinder and Chris Watson. Far from being the worst thing ever, *Red Mecca* was one of the group's finest albums of its Rough Trade period. Recorded in May 1981, it was full of dark electronic trickery over treated rhythms ("Split Second Feeling", "Landslide"), with Watson's excellent organ playing giving it a slightly melancholy edge (as on "A Thousand Ways"). Like *Johnny YesNo*, their soundtrack to the Pete Care film of the same name, this was a brilliant proto-Acid nightmare music. All in all, *Red Mecca* provided extreme relief from the avalanche of New Romantic (or whatever it was called) waffle filling the charts back then, in which fashion victims peddled fancy notions of unreal aspirational lifestyles. Snatched from TV newscasts, Cabaret Voltaire's use of cut-up tapes knitted tightly over electronic beats and barked conspiratorial lyrics, which peeled back the tacky early 80s wallpaper to reveal the command and control structures beneath.

My attraction to them lay in the apparent lack of real musicianship. I had by that time developed a 'rock is dead' attitude (this started to edge away once Swans rolled into town a few years later). Punk sounded good on paper, but the results were more or less a badly played version of something that had already existed before.

I was keen on experiencing something new (badly played or otherwise)...and acts like CV offered this by shedding the standard bass/guitar/drums set up and bringing electronic experimentation into the equation...as well as adding non-musical elements such as tapes. They were by no means the first or only group to use them, and by this time they had already existed for nearly ten years...but they were the ones that grabbed my imagination.

This led me to conclude that the mainstream tastes of my contemporaries were far removed from what I was interested in, and I went on a quest to find more. In the early 80s, record shopping was not easy in St Albans. If finding the information was relatively simple, via John Peel's BBC radio shows or the *NME*, sourcing the actual product was another thing altogether. The local Our Price was useless, and the only independent store was about to close – but not before I managed to purchase some of the few interesting records in its selection: a dog-eared copy of the Cabaret Voltaire single "Seconds Too Late", a handful of Throbbing Gristle bootlegs, and, amazingly, Einstürzende Neubauten's double 7" *Kalte Sterne*.

By 1983, Cabaret Voltaire were signed to Virgin via Stevo's label Some Bizzare. There was a 12" produced by disco legend John Luongo, a shiny new album entitled *Crackdown*, and a sprinkling of live dates. On 20 August, they rolled into the City Hall in St Albans. It's safe to say that nothing as remotely experimental as Cabaret Voltaire had ever played there. A weekly programme of bad Heavy Metal and new wave no hopers was hitherto all the place had to offer, so I made my way there with great excitement. Of course, the turnout was low, with just a few oddballs from the local art school and several carloads of freaks on a day trip up from London.

Their show that night was a runthrough of the new album plus new tracks such as "The Dream Ticket" and "Product Patrol". A fine set, but it was the support act that got my attention. Apart from an unannounced, sparsely mutant set by Clint Ruin (aka Foetus) and Marc Almond, there was the curiously titled Cabaret Voltaire Video Show. The early 80s was full of people getting into video games and tackling this newfound technology, praising its liberating power. The label Doublevision, run by Cabs manager Paul Smith, created an outlet for video works by CTI (Chris & Cosey), Throbbing Gristle, 23 Skidoo, Cabaret Voltaire, film maker Pete Care and audio by The Hafler Trio, Lydia Lunch and Chakk, to name a few. The cover of *Crackdown* featured Kirk and Mallinder, now reduced to a duo, lugging some new video gear with the word 'portable' splashed across the recorder, despite it being excess baggage size.

Initial copies contained a bonus 12" featuring four outstanding tracks from the newly released VHS tape, *Doublevision Presents Cabaret Voltaire*. This could just as well have been called *A Young Person's Guide To...*, as it included all the 'hits' from the Rough Trade period, interspliced with TV images of riots, religious rituals, footage of trips to Japan and general group activity.

At this gig, the video show support slot was essentially a presentation of the Doublevision catalogue, plus other curiosities, most of which turned up on the excellent VHS tape compilation *TV Wipeout*. An eclectic mix, where avant garde films by Chel White and Steve Binnion sat alongside a bilingual interview with David Bowie, some financial advice from Yello's Dieter Meier, The Fall's manager having a row with Factory boss Tony Wilson, and classic videos by Psychic TV, Test Dept, Renaldo & The Loaf and The Cabs. As well as one hour of blank tape to record whatever you wanted (of course, you could also record over the whole lot and have *three* hours of blank tape), extending the DIY aesthetic to video and television. In those days there was nothing like YouTube to instantly satisfy random curiosities. Such compilations and presentations were the only place to find an alternative to mainstream programming. For a brief period it seemed possible for independent companies to make their own television. Not that it lasted, as both industry and consumers opted for the blandness of the corporate MTV model. Although Cabaret Voltaire live in this period were not as pulverising as, say, Swans, or as genuinely enerchic as Neubauten, their shows carried a wealth of information for future use.

By 1985, the video presentations had been dropped, the visuals now serving as a backdrop to The Cabs' audio programme, which was drifting more towards the mainstream before they finally found true recognition as pioneers in the upcoming Ambient House scene. Paul Smith, meanwhile, was setting up a new imprint called Blast First as an outlet for New York group Sonic Youth, whom he brought over to headline a showcase gig at the ICA which also featured Boyd Rice & Frank Tovey, but that's another story... ☐ *Kindertotenlieder by KTL (aka Peter Rehberg & Stephen O'Malley) is out now on Editions Mego*

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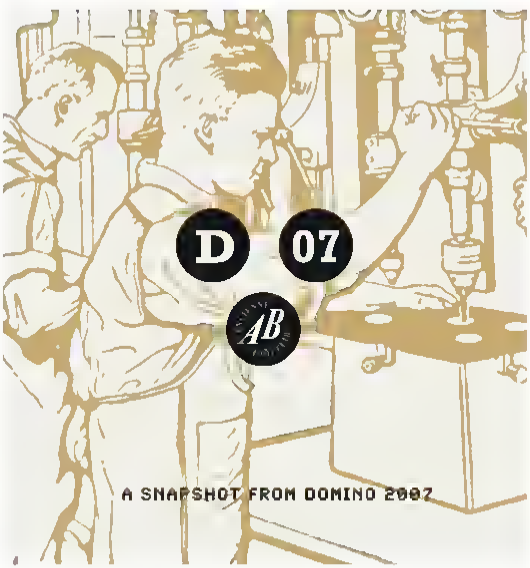

Each year, the Ancienne Belgique venue in Brussels hosts the week-long Domino festival, one of Europe's premier platforms for all manner of underground sonic activity. And each year, the Domino curators put together a special compilation CD featuring tracks by artists that will be appearing at the festival and that is then given away exclusively to all subscribers to *The Wire*. This year is no exception, and with their copies of this month's issue, all the magazine's subscribers will receive a free copy of *D 07 A Snapshot From Domino 2007*, featuring tracks by Deerhoof, Skream, !!!, Coco Rosie, Amon Tobin, The Cinematic Orchestra, Frank Bretschneider, Kiss The Anus Of A Black Cat and more. The Domino festival itself takes place at Brussel's Ancienne Belgique venue between 11–18 April.

For further information go to www.abconcerts.be

D 07 A Snapshot From Domino 2007 is the latest instalment in an ongoing series of discs that are specially produced for *The Wire* and given away exclusively to all the magazine's subscribers with selected issues. These CDs are only available to subscribers, and are not for sale with the magazine in the shops. If you are not yet a subscriber, you can still make sure you get your hands on a copy of the CD by taking out a new subscription to *The Wire* this month.

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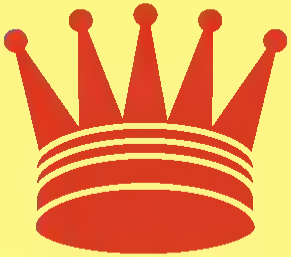

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